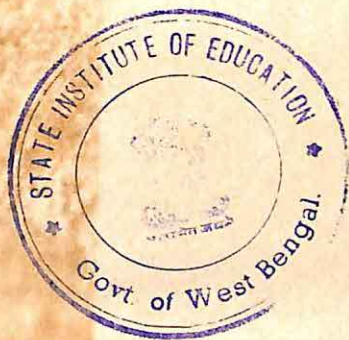


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HISTORY'S TRAGIC EXULTATION

ANOTHER PPH PUBLICATION BY THE SAME AUTHOR

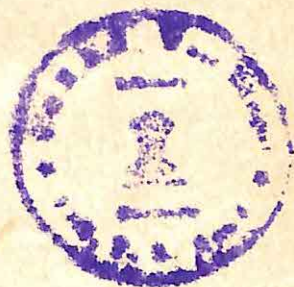
In the Sun and the Rain
Essays on Aesthetics

History's Tragic Exultation

A Few Poems
in Translation

by

Bishnu Dey



PEOPLE'S PUBLISHING HOUSE
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In Memory
of
Bhowani Sen
(1909-1972)

My Only Excuse

I suppose I would not have thought of sending these prosy translations to my friendly publishers, as these are not really poetry, but a series of sporadic efforts to convey some prose idea of the very Bengali verse I had been writing for nearly five decades. A bare-boned prose version cannot be the poetry itself.

My only excuse is that when a writer has been consistently devoted to his vocation and to human life, he can allow himself to be swayed by suggestions from friends and try to have some idea of some of his work conveyed to readers who do not know Bengali.

I am grateful to my young friend Mohit Sen for this PPH publication. Shri Subodh Roy has shown patient interest throughout, in spite of my ill health and my consequent delay. I would like to express my appreciation of the meticulous attention given to the production of this book by Shri M. B. Rao. I need not express my gratefulness to Boudhayan Chattopadhyay, perhaps no longer "the fresh young lad", but who, after more than decades, still "goes on beating his head".

Shri Samir Das Gupta has been long interested in my work and is partly responsible for precipitating this volume. I thank the friends who had translated a few poems included here, for their handsome gesture.

I am grateful to Shrimati Pranati Dey for, as always, her devoted help, and to Professors Satyesh Chakraborty and Sanjit Bose. I thank my friend Shri Hemanta Misra, the artist, who took very great trouble to design the cover of the volume.

17 November 1972

BISHNU DEY

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ERRATA

- Page 14, line 22, for *in the bloom* read *in bloom*
 Page 15, line 20, for *fortune* read *Fortune*
 Page 20, line 12, for *love.* read *love*
 Page 37, line 7, for *look red* read *looks red*
 Page 38, line 11, for *thus blue* read *this blue*
 Page 55, line 11, for *for adventure* read *far adventure*

Early Efforts

A SONNET

His father was blown to pieces, food for carrion-eaters,
Killed in terrible labour to stop the marauders.
Through the stinking heaps only Subhadra and Satyabhama
Wander with bare heads bowed down, watching.

The spring song of joy
Is silenced with tears. Kangsa had emptied the white bowl
In a ruthless storm, and is now gone to his Hell.
The damaged roads of Dwaraka look oppressed with
memories of Mathura and Brinda's leaves burnt up.

His mother is out on the roads, in the simple search for food,
Famine has come riding the ass of terrible pestilence,
And whole regions desolated by the Thugs, the Bargis come
in floods.

By the crumbling lintel of homes with broken doors, while
an Epoch's End neighs loud,
The pure, simple child sits alone and goes on smiling
with joy,

The earth stares on, and all over the world Vasudeva
looks and listens.

(Originally written some time in the early twenties, after some of our journals or newspapers had reported of Anatole France's statement and his offer to the new Russia of the money the Nobel Prize had brought him. From Rushati Panchashati, fifty poems on Red Russia.)

JUVENILE LYRICS

I

Loosening the silver waves, breaking away from the sea's
embrace

April is gone, my laughing light-limbed naiad.

Gone with the frivolous wind

Leaving behind the sharp sunshine.

The beach is empty.

In the sunshine the wet shore is a desert,

The dry sands take on in the sun

The limpid clarity of wine.

She is gone bathed and azure

My light-limbed April.

II

The shadowy fears of the Peepul and the ficusa

People our path at every step.

The moon is a far signal of light.

Darkness stares us face to face.

On night's still waters

Fall the strange nocturnal sounds,

Ceaselessly drip drop.

Unmindful we two walk along,

On a sudden you cry out my name

And open out your arms.

Fear-plucked that gift of your surrender

Is my nosegay forever.

Urvashi-o-Artemis

ESCAPE

The swimming glance of the Safari eyes; and the magic
Of the dark eyebrows have charmed my eyes,
The small silk blooming cheeks and pale smooth forehead
have bound me.
I have breathed in the cool midnight of her anointed hair,
Mouthing the tense orbit of the blood-lined lips
I've heard in those breasts the rush of the planets,
Seen in the moment's mirror the picture of eternity,
Held in love's handful both Uma and Urvashi.
You have made my seven days and nights one song,
You have made me a love lyric !

LOVE

Turn your gaze from my eyes,
Cover the flames with azure clouds,—
The call of your eyes
Awakes tidal music.
Your nebula eyes wake up in my planetary life
The dancing revolution,
My life runs, at the call of your eyes,
Breathless, with eyes fixed on the road of life.
Take away your eyes from my vision.

The spin of the earth stops,
Suddenly and on the frontiers of the world
On the edge of the world, on the dark shore
On the brink of the sky of Nothing
My run halts and hesitates
With the smell of death in my soul.

Cover your face,
Turn your gaze, I beseech you.
To leave my old old earth
And plunge into the waves of nothing,
In this unknown, this secret darkness
Like a bird at your call forever!
With what hope and where?—
Take far away your star-eyes,
Hide the flame in azure clouds.

(1928)

I, A STRANGER

*He feared, so, alone we fear. He created another, he feared;
so we fear company. (Brihadaranakya Upanishad)*

I, a stranger wandering in this human jungle,
I speak face to face, but unshakable walls stand before
my eyes.
An alien traveller, due to the primally ordained blunder
I've come to this Hall; a refugee; I cannot follow their
words.

Into Nature's boudoir I come a barbarous stranger—
The barbarian does not know and offends at every step,
And at each wrong step reptiles hiss up their heads.
Fear flung over earth and water shakes me without rest.

It has been always like this, the days ever unfulfilled
And nights without peace—my Trishanku heart ever
hanging in mid-air.

THE NEW MOON

The new moon has vanished beyond the fortified blue;
The sea nods nerveless, the tide is dead.
Defeated, drowsily roll the riderless waves,
And the night is lonely and loveless, dark without rest.

The sea of consciousness is now a calm self-mirrored lake,
No starry ecstasy, only the hollow twilight.
The mind absorbs the glow, and the world beside me,
The world and I, my own long shadow.

There is no love beneath that shadow, there the tired mind
wakes;

The night-roving mind stirs in that sharp darkness,
Let your eyes, my dear, forget their message;
In my mind throbs the darkness of the primeval womb.

Chorabali

ONE RAIN-CLOUD

There is no crowd in the sky, only one cloud spread over,
The lid is down on the wordy mouth of the earth.
There is no argument, one dove-soft cloud
Soothes the tired eye, casts peace on the body
And brings her image to the mind, cool, ever so little eager.

O her ordinariness! one likes her, simply;
Her mind is limpid, limited in concreteness,
I know, she knows only the immediate, the diurnal.
She has only the woman's narrow wisdom, common,
No Mahasweta, never; yet one likes to think of her.

The sharp hills have vanished. The sky is one rain-cloud.

OPHELIA

Yet this boldness. If you tear down all Spring's
Gathered songs, break into bits these preserved flowers,
Throw away the leafy shade by the riverbank trek, if you
Burn out this soft grassy sleep in mountainous cold,
Yet this boldness, yet I go on with this singing.

You are like a house curtained all-over,
And I the wind, damp with November dew—
Day and night I go round and round sleepless.

Listless, look, clouds sprinkle gold on the sky's body.
My words are homeless, they go up and down the Milky
Way.
Has your heart woven its nest in the high heavens?

Stormy winds hurl wild black clouds
At the full moon of March.
That I love you, is it only that, my Ophelia?

Light up the lamps in your eyes.
This darkness is frozen into dark rocky hills.
The moist chilly winds hurtle the black woods
Into mourning, the Sal trees go numb.
This darkness in a stop-less shriek grips
The heart like Hades. Let your eyes hold the lamps.
Lift up, tear open the black drop-curtain of Life.

Night nestles by my side—
An ice-cold hard bright sword with its razor edge,
Night and I alone.

Autumn's clouds suddenly glow white in gaiety—
The Earth sends up in invitation white bunches of Kasha—
Foolish? Yes, foolish.

On the slope to the lotus-pool you tore into bits
My song woven with many Aswins,
And let them float away on the calm water—
That still deep blue lotus-pool is my own heart.

The loud stream runs on this drunken expedition—
Quiet the white sandy island.
Has it acquired poise in her life? there's peace in her song.
You have spell-bound me, Ophelia.

Mystic blue deepens in her eyes—
A cool deep lake enclosed
By snow-peaked walls.

You brought in your hands magic charm
Woven with soft dreams of green sleep!
Waking up I find that world flown away.

It is as if Krandasi dew drops down round you!
When will the high lake whirl down into Mandakini?
In that torrent let my baptism be complete.

Death we two did not triumph over, with Eros and Psyche
in our arms

We have not yet held Life tight.
Yet in the red glow of the setting sun and in dew-white
dawn

Unendingly we roam round.

Devayani! at the sunset hour, with your kneeling piety
Blows the conch-shell pardon of my painful day
In the spiralling odorous chant of curse-lifting—
That is my discipline of penance.

Your eyes hint forth freedom—far birds fly up in the sky
In your fist the snows of peace, scatter once in drops of
rain,
Let the heart fly to heaven, let life be snow-cool.

Proserpina covers up with flowers, Baitarani nearby
Spreads out ah! an invitation to soft azure sleep.
Yet for whose incarnation the unappeased man wavers
Staring forth beyond the heath, a mendicant, body and soul!

Bring forward in redeemed hands fearless love.
In the sunset sky let the Baisakhi wind laughing and
roaring
Hurl down the illusion of Death.

Yes, you brought laughter—
I never saw behind the silkscreen cloud
The thunderbolt's movement to and fro.

Amaravati's godly walls crash down on this mortal earth!
This meteor, my conflagrating world had in your eyes
Acquired its supreme goal.

AMPHIBIUM

Do you rouse body-and-soul the passion of a bird?
To hear wings day and night beating the wind?
So the winged rhythm will tune up the heart
In far skies, in the unbounded joy of the mind.

Crowds in cities, futile the days burn:
Helpless? a coward? shall I walk on or run?
Friends frown in fear, ah borrowing beggar!
Countless are the people, yet each burns alone.

Lounging in libraries has come to an end,
Irony in friendship with literary gents.
Loneliness face to face unflinching stares!
On all sides clouds of fatigue descend.

Baffled the eyes, the feet unfixed—
Who wants stability? no turtle, o phoenix:
Give me the rude tempo of the skies
Even to roam from peak to peak,
Where the cool clear air pecks,
Let my days run mixed with life and death
In one tall rainless poise.
O roamer between two poles, in your eye's steel-blue praise
Let my hard long days flash the upraised blade,
O flash in the rude tempo of the skies, feet unfixed.

CRESSIDA

Dream is my poetry,
Diwali of a moonless night,
The smoke-eyed, demonic, sleepless
Sun of a winter night.

My heart is a ferry passenger on Baitarani's banks,
Pilotless on tidal sands, eyes burn dying in the distance,
My heart overflowing with the wailing of the wind.

You gathered in my days in your sari's scarf-end
Into my sand-stalking vision pours your nearness.
You want my nights also? In the July downpour
My loud heart is a palm-shaded lake, ceaselessly lapping.

Cressida! benediction radiates in your withheld eyes.
Immemorial unction of the actor-and-act ends in your arms,
In you I defeat demented death.

Great Time proffers me his right hand,
O faint faltering heart!
To go hand in hand with Destiny, the great sea calling
To surrender all!

For love of Helen stormy cymbals clamour in wind and sky.
In heaven and earth the gods and goddesses rush about
frantic,
Last night there was a tempest in the grove of the
night-lilies.

Baisakhi clouds loom dark in the far horizon.
Dust from a thousand chariot-wheels gather on the
battle-field,
Dream of twilight is drowned in the din of bitter blood.

Blue clouds thrust at red clouds, grey clouds push out
the blue,
Chaotic with clouds is this black Kalki's day.
Shiva's horn blasts out the lightning, thunderbolts lose
their way,
Only Cressida's words still soar fluttering confused wings.

If error brings me to the banks of Baitarani,
To whom do I give this dark futureless fatigue?
Where is that Pandar in this hot desert's desolation?

From the ambivalent speech of which emergent god
Springs Helen's babble, the eclectic woman from
Parnassus!
My Shefali alone is a freak, withering before the Hibiscus.

In showering sunlight life sprouts forth.
Hope of resurrection, I know, lies at the source of
self-surrender.
I, a prisoner in a sunless realm, in you, virgin, seek speech.

Time's Wallet is tattered, eaten up by the worms of
oblivion.
Worshipper of the cult of life, I turn helpless to you.
The killers noisily roll over the plains of Troy!

The traffic of death greys the great evening heavens.
Continuous are the necrogenic rites in Helen's breast.
Yet the bowl of my heart's sky is ringing with the hymn
of life.

Why are the towers of Troy so brittle? What Helen's
Immortal beauty makes the huge world bewildered in
passion?
Why this transcendent beauty? Why this earth-bound
thirst for death?

I know, this gyiring on the wheel of fire, I know,
That is why I don't speak in paradoxes.
Cressida! the violence of my feeling is only
The wandering of the moth in love with mad life.

Golden laughter cascades from your lips!
The doe of life darts about and diffuses magic on your
limbs.
That boisterous singing stops. The bay tree is mute now.
Has harvest-time come in the life of carefree laughter?

This then is the dawn
O my poor Shefali lying on the ground!
Is there no comfort left?

You gave me that night a stem of the night-lily,
She is in the bloom even today—
Slim flower of intoxicating night
The Night-lily, knows she no apathy?

Not even in a nightmare did love expect this!
In the enemy camp this naked speech in the girl's
Lowered eyes, her face, her whole body!
O Greek gallant! You defeat Troy today.

The shadow of Time's vast guffaw
Has submerged all, even your death-charm!
O Matarishwa! in the joy of the great void
I snap my fingers at your mighty face.

Did you think ever you would drive me mad?
My mind yet knows no hysteria.
Against the earthbound armour of my will
Your spear hurtles down, broken into bits.

My soul is beyond sin and disembodied
On this headless trunk of blind action I spit in play,
I do not beg for Cause and Effect. My soul is snow-clad.

The blue of the mountains is massed up in the tide of
grey clouds—

The blue of the Five Mountains.
The winds have all fled home from the cloud's grip.
Quiet and still are the Seven Lakes.

Jackals and vultures turn fugitive. I know fortune is a
chameleon.

Indraprastha stands on the fields of Kurukshetra. Victory
belongs to Parikshit.

Looting the beauty of autumn I return: Hail, hail Troilus!
Droves of slaves sing in joy.

On the flood of the victor king's bounty
Float the citizens and the homeless, the hungry, the
beggars!

Hyena's laugh echoes in my memory. Cressida the
thoughtless!

You went away at the magic call of Death the Maricha
With lips deaf and mute.

Then, out of the churning of war from afar came the
foreign woman,
On a black evening she offered her white arms.

—Your memory slashes, a sword even today!

Purbalekh

From "FOURTEEN SONNETS": No. 1

No more speech off-stage in this Poetic Play,
The herald comes back sad from his front line tour.
Spring's wanderlust ends on Kailasa's way,
Desires crystallise and I come home once more,
Calm from the adolescent lone tirade.
Elective mind tires of luxuries of Truth,
The nomad finds in his laissez-faire trade
His ego's limits, my skylarking youth!

Great Mother! prodigal I now reclaim
My corner in your many-mansioned house.
Strange generations crowd there, yet in the same
Eternal feature shining in your face
I recover my past, recast my future days—
The firebrand bursts into a hymn of praise.

(1936)

From "FOURTEEN SONNETS": No. 8

The evening star beckons back to the dark and quiet home
All those who are scattered by the Sun's rule—
Cows from pastoral Chowringhee,—the lost selves,
The industrious clerks, and the perambulators—
And infants to their mothers' breasts. In this dense hour
What Polestar spreads hints on the roads!
Distraught and alien minds are lost with wandering
Through this city, huge and indifferent, without a flutter.

This heavy and lonely Mathur is unbearable,
In the nerves forest-fearing primeval cries well up.
In cinema halls, cafés, shops, lanes, highway crossings
Millions of Rakta-beej jaundiced men go about
Fatally cursed, all scattered, sick for unity...
Perhaps Kangsa's chariot approaches and the earth quakes?

GOLDEN THE COWDUST HOUR

Golden the cowdust hour, yet in my hollow heavens
Burns the arid dream of an afternoon. O my azure heart!
Ecstasy grows pale over the flaming fields and forges
In desire, in love. Yet the awkward heart is cold.
I set sail on love's magic waters, yet it burns
Scarred and charred, for Lethe is but dead and dry.
O village cowherd-boy, O coolie-on-the-railway-lines, let
Life flow, let loose the floods, make me current in
commonness.

Let this discord of body and mind, the world and the self
On the mound of this hydra's head sing into a green tree,
Strong and straight in the trunk, intimately earthy,
yet rich in airy foliage.
Let the Timons abdicate their doubts and debts,
And look! Hegel's vainglory lying low on the ground,
In factories, in ploughlands, in the pavement paintings
of Matisse, in the street rallies of Mallarmé's pupils.

LOVE IS THE NEST IN THE SKY

This heavy load of homeless love
Who can bear but you, tell me?
In the drowning rain, I pass by your court
You look and open your door, my sweet.

Tides roar across the river, the ferry
Has stopped, the fair has closed.
There is only the lonely country road
Stretching to the sky in the cloud and thunder passion.

In this climatic cold, who would make,
But you, the home the world,
The world the home,
Tell me. Only your love.

Is the nest in the sky, the mid-river island.
In that azure of self-surrender
Who can bind the great void
But you, tell me. Only at your heart

I stop at last, in full knowledge.

(1936)

11.5.94
8296



SUMMER IN CALCUTTA

Marble-still
Are the artificial lakes.
Their grassy banks parched and shrivelled
Like the desolate earth of some volcanic valley, marking
Of a traveller's journey, the end
Unforgiving;
Restlessly shuffle
The bloated cars, vain kings;
American saloons,
One or two shameless tourers,
Cycles and phaetons,
Hawkers of almonds and ice-cream vendors,
The tricycle of the Happy Boy or Esquimo Pie.
If ever the wind blows
And the dust clouds up from the macadam!—
The heat stifles.
In the Hogg Market the crowds thin out;
Beneath the forbidden luxury of the Krishnachura trees,
In the pale gold of the Gul-Mohur,
One can hear the dying gasp—
Here and there, on all sides,
In the hysteric traffic of Chowringhee
And in the deserted bazars;
Beyond where the dirty river,
Silent, slides on in the glittering sun,
The sirens weep no more.
No forgiveness.
There is no forgiveness wherever you are.



In the cool, conditioned air of the cinema,
If only one could sit and breathe,
Gaze at Ninotchka smiling—smile and then sneeze!
Unforgiving time, hard and deathless;
Time unforgiving.
Villages burn like furnaces,
Breath ceases in their dead drooping orchards,
In the dingy smoke, the moss and weeds, the dirt, their
broken bone-set commons
Where the hairless, festering street-dogs roam;
In the ruined cloisters, among the roofless temples,
The parched rivers, still canals and weed-clogged tanks;
In the quarrels of rival fairs, where the Union Boards
bargain

Over unsunk tubewells.

There is no peace in nature, peace has settled
Upon the burrasahib's jute mills.

And so I greet you from the distance, my Bengal, my lovely Bengal!

O forgive and forgive—fill these hard-dying lives with song!
My song floats in the meadows, in paddy fields, upon the
waters,

Sowing the *Aus* seeds* with arms raised in rhythm.
Summer unleashed by the rain.

Summer releases her rich-hoarded triumph
In the wind, and the wind is the trumpet

In the rain-flood which threatens the railway embankment.
In thunder

In thunder, songs burst from the soil, the river flows,
The earth gives life, the sky gives light.

The earth gives life, and hope shines through the
thunderous lightning rain,
The rich soil we plough, and the seed we sow

The rich soil we plough with visions of reaping,
Knowing that our nation's fate

Knowing that our motion of sowing will pass into the
rhythm of the sickle.

The summer knows no forgiveness, deathless time stands
Unforgiving, Callidus, heavy.

Unforgiving, Godlike. In history, in that great palace,

* For the late rice crop

On the various floors and apartments wanders the swift
spy of Time.

Quick, furtive, and ubiquitous; the Favourite meditates
In silence — perhaps it is to her room that the King's
messenger

Will come — the best of the seven queens, freshly culled
In her youth, so she thinks; but the spy goes on,
Enveloped in his own concentrated search,
That unblushing grin knows no forgiveness —

In the impending stroke there is no forgiveness. Time holds
The imperial ensign, uniform over the entire world and the
seas,

Impending doom. Yes, yes, I know, that is why there is no
peace

In this sweaty, sultry heat; men with merchandise, clerks,
Accountants wander restlessly, in their maniac greed,
Driven by mad selfishness in this desperate hour,
Like old beasts on their way to lonely death.

Unforgiving, I return home back to the
Squalid suburbs in the north, lured by the dark cage,
A foreman, not quite labour, but skilled, almost gentry —
I return and sing, O death you are dead!

And in the distant air floats over flags, in broken snatches,
the same refrain.

(1938)

THE SICKLE MOON

Look, love, at the moon: a sickle in the sky —
Rising, our moon ought to be sickle-shaped!
Pile flower on flower to hide our sordid plight;
Shed beauty's light on my bare roof, where high
The gentle wind will dry our burning fear
And waft us on a sea of pale moonlight.

What should we fear? I recognise no fear
Let us go up, slowly hand in hand —
On the road to peace chasms have always gaped,
And the guests of joy must thither wade through tears —
Look, look at the moon: a sickle in the sky —
Our rising moon ought to be sickle-shaped!

Sorrowful men strike blindly out at dreams,
But the world's end and their real ache are far.
Let tyrants trample on the human sand,
Torpedoes plough the deep blue ocean stream —
Here today, away tomorrow, let me laugh;
For like the cash to spend, I have Today in hand;

The air will shed no bombs on us today;
We may be poor; yet life resides in us.
Our lords and masters profit by our rape;
Gangsters and salesmen undermine our way:
Their greed makes the air stink; our mouths taste death —
So our moon, rising, has a sickle's shape!

No myth-bound hero in a pious tale,
I praise the downfall of establishment.
The stubble burns away: siren sounds die:
Dismay hides the oppressor like a veil.
Love beating like a hammer in my heart!
The moon rising athwart, a sickle in our sky!

(Tr. by J. O. Bartley)

Satbhai Champa

LENIN: A SONNET

Where accidents of birth or whims of money
Determine the world's value, high or low,
And gambling greed flits where the wealthy go,
Man is a bagatelle, a pawn, not worth a penny.
Through this irrelevant fault mankind has been
For ages in the dark, paltry amid profusion.
But empire's siren-song of commerce queen
Now ends, is changed in Life's great revolution.

Each his own value now, life is based on reason.
Now starts the blade-sharp conflict, that's world-wide
Of mind and body, now new patterns grow
Being classless.

At the delta mouth has risen
The Soviet worker's sacrificial tide;
Brothers! Your Bhagirath is our Lenin now.

(Tr. by Martin Kirkman)

CALCUTTA: 22 JUNE 1941

Along your fear-clad streets the lamps are dim;
The middle-class kitchen, smokeless, no more blurs
A loiterer's eye, or dulls the moon's blue gleam
That lights our homes — or sharp to raiders shows
Our vulnerability.

O let me die
Gay on the crest of life! by no blind chance.
Yet middle-class Calcutta, you can cry
To war-torn lands for cheap deliverance!

Heroes we need to fill the leaders' role —
Foxes in secret mate. But Russia, China,
Heroes can find in farmer, clerk and miner,
And fear redeemed.

Corroding war spreads still,
Even in her dark days India shaken stands;
Calcutta's Jatayu wings reach Soviet lands.

(Tr. by Martin Kirkman)

IN THE MOFUSSIL — 1942

Farmers have deserted the fields, mice scurry into stacks;
Golden the sunset fades, and the formless melancholy of
twilight
Crystallises on the mountains, vanished is the romantic
vision
Of girls on the river path, and silent the music;
Loud invisible bats fly towards the hills;
In the bungalow I sit alone, full of some nameless
expectation.
Night stretches wide before me, blue in the endless dark;
The dim glow pulses and sends out harmonies
In sharp attacks, in resonant cadences,
And throws out its starlit fugues in gathered rapture.
Before my eyes in this night-blue the great world merges,
And loneliness absorbs me into its palpable vastness.
Even my lonely self is merged into this outward world
Where the skies of all lands float their images
Of dark futility, of starving blankness, in dim gleams
Of diffuse gold and the lost music of bright life;
My desperate dreams subdue the starlight,
And the mountains look down in godly awe, in a
heartless grin of immortal approval.

THE PEOPLE FOREVER

How many brigands have raided our country, how
many times?

Ravaging village after village, piling up cruelties, crimes!

How many *bulbuls* have ravished our grains,

Mothers have crooned of tyrannical reigns,

In spite of it all the proud spirit remains

Of the people forever!

The peasant, the potter, the fisher, the blacksmith,

the boatman, the weaver!

The soul is immortal in this immortal country of mine,

And hence out of Death's deep mouth comes music

adamantine

Here on the margin of wandering streams

Gold-coloured harvest eternally gleams —

Ripe through what myriad ages of dreams, —

While, a fire of lust,

The red Earth burns, reducing all Tanakasans into dust!

Remember, O Comrade! when Freedom's shut door

is opening apart,

A handful of cowardly ashes will seem the small

strife in your heart!

For lo, our dear land through the long centuries

What marvellous cultures hath drained to the lees,

What sword-sharp ways it has trod, with what ease,
What dangerous tracks!
Today it is wielding in conscious resistance a fiery axe!

(Tr. by Harindranath Chattopadhyaya)



FOR BENU

*(of the IAF who died in an unchecked fighter plane
as he took off and the plane crashed)*

Adolescent daze
Still gleams in his eyes.
In his dream-world of life
He has sojourned without rest,
Callous death
With its dichotomy of selfishness
Of nations, of colour, of class, of all those tricks of the
calculating
Never could drag him into the clan of Thugees and traders.

In life's own joy
He now floats in the undivided sky
In the blue of his being he sojourns free.
Today when death smells, in love with the earth
His heart shines forth freely
In his resonant journeys from cloud to cloud
The Sun knows his metric, the Sun lends his body
The fearless gold of joyous grace.

Does he know, the virginal boy,
That the hope of New Life springs forth in suddenness
Even in blind death in an accident?
Does he know his choice today is right?

He knows in the sky of his undying being, how
horizon-wide
Life moves without end,
This boy, this hero!

On the ruins of brittle grief
Does he build with his hands a new altar of consciousness
With his revolutionary wings, on his golden eagle,
The Sun in his eyes, Karnaphuli dumb at his feet,
And Irrawaddy flowing still in expectation?

(1942)

RED STAR: A RHYME

At your birth rose the red star,
Unsullied Earth raised her arms,
May-skies rang with the Uchchaisrava neigh,
And the seven Kalpurushes sang a concerted song.

Rudra's laughter and Uma's loving fire
Were filled to the brim in the mudra of your arms.
They don't yet know you, O Boy,
And they try to cast their ogrish magic on you.

Let riots be sponsored, let blood redden the earth,
Let them try to bring death to the country here, there and
everywhere.
Let them build a hundred strongholds in cities, on
mountains.
Comets vanish with the red glow of your star.

Let spies travel in the sky and fill the air !
Is that why the winged horse will stop his flight?
Let sentries and guards go about here and there,
Why should your great horse halt?

Who can stop this triumphal march
After all the Ages of churning Time's waves,
Washed with heroes' blood and mothers' tears?
Picking up moat-mud in blind alleys?

We heard a river ran mad in a far-off land,
The King's men tried to stop it with mud,
It broke through the dykes, History ever runs
Like Thames,—who can stop it?

Let shots be fired, a hundred whips be raised
In Bengal's villages, on hills, in Calcutta,
Yet, Boy, your horse goes galloping
Faster than these electrical tram cars.

In your eyes shines the red star,
Your arms raised, your fixed fists hold fire,
The demons of all lands are distraught
And crippled run amok in despair, here and there.

In vain, they spread red streams of blood!
Over villages and towns everywhere, the red star of birth
Burns on with the patter of your footsteps
In that land and this, with wings beating.

Your horse's hooves never come off,
Its adventure has been hammered with life and steel.
That is why from your wrists ring and roar
Mighty songs of victory in this land of your timid friend.

Sandwiper Char

CASSANDRA

Tell us, Cassandra, where was such misfortune?
We all brood—almost the whole land, except a few—
—Open your mouth, Cassandra, what punishment is this?
For what sin this blinding the eyes, oh why,
Your Sun wounds us all—except a few,
Who slink into the godlike golden bowl.

We never saw Helen, we never sought in that magic face
The godly limits of our earthly beauty,
We never bought a reputation with Ithacan trickery,
Why do we die in our own homes in this greedy war of Troy
We shed our head-sweat on our feet in vain!
In this mart of Kings and princes, human life here
has no guarantee.

We are no advanced nation, we work daily, and eat,
We never bothered our heads over ruling the country,
Uptil now we had avoided all talk of the big world.
And the world's burden falls on these shoulders, life is
at stake,
The evil rulers bring the infection,
And its sores show off the naked sunlight.

Tell us Cassandra, Sunworship is in our nature,
And at last all our generations will be wiped out under
the same Sunlight!

We all had chanted the magic hymns in our corners,
A whole nation of simple good people—except a few—
And will they all die of starvation and pestilence?
In the Sun's own land there seems to be a dearth of
human decency!

MAUBHOG

At their birth, the peasants forged sickles with steel
And the peasant-wives made girdles and bangles.
Their journey is on a difficult path, their youthful
 wrists are entwined with Rakhi-bands—
Oh! the ogres sharpen their nails in vain.

The Red-lotus boy keeps watch before the Blue wakes up,
With one sleepless sword held in his hand,
His forehead, anointed with Dawn's own vermillion,
look red!
—Whose end has come?

Thieves and burglars mask themselves, ogres release
Stolen goods bonneted with black,
All the Desperadoes of the queen's clan offer worship
With Human Sacrifice on the Skeleton Hill.

But here the red flags of life wave united in brotherhood,
Held in joined hands by the Red-lotus boy and the Blue.
Their words flutter in the wind, the peasants forge sickles
with steel,
The workers start singing in the Workshops.

(Kisan Conference, a triumph over communalism,
in Maubhog, now in Bangladesh)

Anvista

From 'ANVISTA'*

That search is mine too

I want at sunset and sunrise—
Let everyday's heavenly bow break and scatter in layers
In the wonder of living, let it scatter fountains of colours,
Let it bring in smiling life,
Simple joy, the pity of human sorrows,
The simple pain of living, the red passion of life,
Free in the active psyche, coloured at sunset
Or at sunrise, bright fresh and awake.

At day's end, my companion the sunset sky
Or at dawn, the glimmer of freedom of the beginning in
 thus blue, full of work quivering with speed,
In crows and kites, in starlings and parrots,
On tramcars, buses, on feet, in the village-cum-towns,
 factories and mills,
At the intimate hour this mobile 'ananda'
In the heart-ache of the clouds, in the union of movement
 and stillness,

* *The Searched-for* or *The Objective*.

(It is a long poem. Only some portions have been translated.)

In mist and vapour, prints in colours even our sky-heart
 —even ours
 So I can see in the silence of the secluded woods
 At the crossing of the four roads the shadow of the day's
 end descending
 In the wooded village, in houses and hutments,
 Counting up who returns and who goes, when.
 In the vegetative sea of darkness, light mingles,
 my light too,
 So, in heaths hidden by the hills
 I have seen the sun's journey to some exile land
 The same red, the same seven-tinted symphony
 Wakes up deathless life in the saddened nerves,
 blood and bone,
 Rich in consciousness lit up and stormblown in man's
 history
 In fields and granaries, cottages and hillocks, with
 plough-strokes
 In Sravan crowds of clouds, in Aswin's emeralds and
 sapphires,
 In autumnal winds, in the crystal days and diamond
 nights and winter,
 In the restless throbs of Phalgun—
 In sunset and sunrise, continuously relishing—
 My search too is that:
 Let the integrated atoms
 Come into life in colours, human, I want we all
 Break the heavenly bow in sunset and sunrise, and
 scatter all over life!
 O beautiful in life's wonder, sadness, dignity,
 I want the sky in life,
 The freedom of leisure, the ananda of living I want.

In my life you are day and night, one-only sky
 In the four winds, always breathing,

Sometimes in easterly Asharh clouds, or Sravan thunder
Some days or some nights
In wild sweating dance in open-mouthed wavy winds :
There is your analogy;
Or in some clear sharp blue day of Magh
Or perhaps in some naive Aswin
I turn intimate, circling with the winds.
In your life I am always a newcomer,
A sudden gay joke—
Or a gift on birth or death-days
You bring me, carefully, a precious present
After that I fade out in the crowd of time,
Just droop away here and there through the cracks of
daily life.
Or perhaps like a flood I come
In great pomp, and then float away somewhere an emigré
In the 'Kapila'-sea of consciousness.

Say when in daily-ness, in your body and mind,
your home,
My soul's vapour will find its nest in your sky—
Where in the air floats
Sometimes the concentrated storm, sometimes the
vague-minded morning star
In my sleepless sky?

Sleep, sleep you on, in the blue of the country night—
Spread out in the blue sky your luminous sleep spread
forth
In the cleansing bath of so much fatigue, breathing in
and out
In murmuring phrases flowing with the stream and
scattering on this side and that,
Float on through the calmed world of consciousness.
In the oceanic expense of how many suns and stars,
in a glimmering continuum

I watch you sleep, intent with my ears I listen; sleep,
sleep on,
In my sleepless going round and round, I move about
on the moonlit land,
Across hills, through Palasa woods, shady paths, by spring-
water lakes,
By the dozing Sun's storehouse of Lightning.

I go about on all sides, mute, rapt, alone, I don't try to kiss,
In case waves roll out from sleep, in the tense voice
of the tremulous heart,
In case the sudden shock of awareness stops at the sudden
rhyming.
So within the Sun's orbit in inextinguishable skyey
tenderness
I watch your being and listen to your heart-beat—
sleep, go on sleeping.

(Line 190)

In no dream, this I construct after hell,
I have seen many evils, wrong-doings, stupid waste,
greedy oppression
Known much pollution in our present days,
In the twisted patterns of competitive life and living,
Have seen how particles of joy die from the dawn of a
child's life
Everyday, minute by minute,
In ruthless stupid conspiring habits.
How minds in thousands and thousands, in stabs and stabs
Of compound-interest habits are maimed and limbless
Thousands and thousands of myself have I seen and
suffered too.

My journey too is through hell, with my body smelling
of Elysium,
I too have sniffed at the food of vultures and jackals,
With an immortal glow in my mind, I too have gasped
In the Pilgrim's roll-call book in the commedia of
death-defeating Man.
I have noted down, have painted millions of millions of
bodies and souls
In damage and death—
Hell's million pictures our own portraits.

This I compose after Hell.
Through many years, in many a ruler's empire,
Where villages and towns have been turned to desert
markets,
Where life is the ancient pice-worth slave, none is any one,
And living is squeezed between Kuvera and Kotwals,
thugs and thugs,
Rats and foxes,
Day to day, in country after country, Britain or Yankee
whoever holds the helpless;
Worse than women who are sold as goods.

I know utter loneliness as I have seen the crowd:
Crowds in offices, in market places, crowds on sofas and
chairs,
Crowds in moneylenders' lanes, in the Stock Exchange and
face to face
Descends loneliness and brings within the frame of the
dying day
The picture of a horrible intense vacuity.
At my back keeps awake the journey through Hell,
The wide background of extra-personal history—
O my friend, join the hands and the pens, the spades, the
ploughs, the writing,
So that our hope and despair may be welded together!

You light up the mighty fire of life
In this my darkness with your raised ready lamp!

The course of my journey has been long and brittle
Covering civilisations wide and far.
The hope I have is hope at the hell-end of the human mind,
Not the glory of death, not natural healthy death, but the
hope
Of the border beyond the inhuman crooked death-world
The final moment only, the release-card—
The permit at the end of the panorama of hopelessness
To a transformation into a new hope
The pass-word with a new vocabulary, like the river at the
mouth of the sea.
At the back of my journey there is a long-lived background,
And facing me
You.

With fire and ice with Hell's white and black,
Good and bad, with the dialectics and clear agony of life
and death
With crystallised being with body-mind nerves all one
With tense bowstring devotedly practising, and practising
with Ekalabya arrows

Living on and on—
Living on empty heaths, digging at the soil
In the ogre's castle in the secret cave
Day by day, year by year on the last mound of the Hell
Of ferociously greedy but ever-fleeing deceit
In a new quite different hope on the brink of the illogical
Inferno—

With the new utterly different hope
With the integration of the individual,
Long-living joyous notes of the music—
At the end of the journey I have come

To our rich earth full of plenty, and prosperous, to mine
and your land
Blown by the storms of Peace, blown away and all by
myself
Into man's continuity and sequence, to love, friendship,
work, creativity:
This world is my own country, let our hands meet.

(L 395)

Look, look,
The fresh young lad there goes on beating his head
In desperate passion,
His hair blown about, with marks of blood
He beats his head in the hope of Life
He wants oh! listen, resurrection, the fresh young boy
Your and our own.
He beats his head in mighty courage
Blinded with the furious rage of hope against hope.
He wants to hold on his own head the earth's staggered sky,
The full weight of Vasuki.
He is no criminal, no thief or murderer!
He only holds tight our mighty hope
He only goes about searching for expression
He only wants to give form to life, in fields and workshops,
In houses and homes
In this new era of Life.
That is why on the pavement
He beats his head, if only out of his pained cries,
If only out of the churned agony of the fountain of hate,
Life wakes up from the stones and concrete slabs
In the grand annunciation of amity in factories and mills
In rallies and processions.
Come, let us too give life to these and those, to this stony
world
Let us give our eyes to this blinding passion
Give them our own minds in work and song

Let the boy, let the stony young men of the world
Revive
And to our own resurrection.

(L 451)

Here the lighted eyes glimmer in life's dark chamber,
The Manas cranes give place to civilised chains of scorpions
The touchstone peak runs like a fountain stream in freedom
Strong in the daimonic passion of genius.

Who is that pretty slim girl broken into bits in a
thousand mirrors?

How many lovely faces have been fragmented by the
Three Eyes, how many thighs and arms?

Does the ascetic ever hold the bride in his arms with the
dawn-song?

Is the unnervingly still vision of old science
Picasso's own? Alhambra's starlight burns in Guernica's
fires,

The honeymoon gleams in the ravages.

Is Picasso a great river whose every moment is a fresh
expedition to the seas

His being an unquenchable impersonality?

What mighty demolishing and letting things flow away,
raising all the while fresh silt!

What weaving of deathless seven-tiered life even with
funerals and graves,

Constructing homes on battles and wars in pity and
tenderness

In what sharp revolutionary transformation!

(L 487)

Most of the lights are out, here and there only a few
blackout bulbs

With the mortal's eternal longings ever in my eyes,
— Not like a child flying a kite or a balloon —
But carrying on my back a huge Past,
The unquenched stone of the End
Has been carved with my Future
Which resists death, resists the death of the heart!
And so I want you, let us go together in search of the
Mountain—
Of Man.

ELLORA

In the sky is your freedom. The Kailasa that sculptors
Have carved in with your wave-tossed dance
Finds its partner in the azure, where there is no gold, no
wily marketeers,
Where, in the eye of the void, fulfilment shines in freedom.

In that Daksha's ritual drama, the stable earth trembles in
the repeated beat of destruction,
The age of Coronations of royal hatred is past with the
Birth of the fighter Child;
Nataraja all bereft, blue-throated, beats time with his
blown-out cheeks.
And at his footfalls Earth awakes, and Sati raises her up,
the all-suffering.

Sanyasi, your freedom is bound with inanimate rocks and
the sky,
In the sun and the rain, in light and shade you go on
inscribing
Your open signature in hard basalt on the blue sky,
You, Lord of Time!

We are the sculptors, not the carvings, we bring freedom
In labour, on fields, in noisy machine-rooms, in daily
agitation,
Freedom comes to us blue-throated, in daily handfuls.
We are mortal men.

(1947)

"POETRY WITHOUT A BREAK"

(for Paul Éluard)

I have heard, that in olden times certain poets
In the seclusion of their hearts' homes, in safe song
Had held, it is said, this one of the lily-garden
Or that one — some Lady Muse.
Nowadays even the dream of such private heaven
No more comes easily to poets.

Today the housewalls are breached; the wailing
Of all the homeless of the world blows in and out.
Private conversation with laughter is also a chorus.
The days now are bright with a procession of sunlight,
The evenings nowadays are thicker with darkness,
Sleep also is torn in the destitute night of poets.

Cloudpale are the beloved of the Yakshas, the dear old
Malavikas,
They are today swords in the sharp light
Or are evenings in the cloud-wounded end of an Age,
There is summer lightning in their arms,
In their eyes the high waters that ripen the grain.
Onto the crest of the swift tide speed the songs of poets.

Therefore accept the admission of a poet,
The home and the world are one, and you are the
housewife;

Make your home, beloved, in the barracks which
span the earth;
The gallows of Greece are the backscene of your embrace,
And the eyes of the people of my own land deepen.
I am one of those oncoming poets.

Oh those dreams turn one out on the roving road.
The night today is midday fire
All the time, in dreams, night's laws
Are torn away and whirl about—no, not with any shy veil,
Only the lean naked crushed roads
Only the public thoroughfares.

People on the roads,
Men of the roads, women, children.
From road to road walk: helpless eyes
On dead faces burn white and black eyes,
Fading eyes, raging eyes on fiery faces, eyes of the
desperate,
Eyes of dreams, creators' eyes.

Beggars' eyes, eyes of the aged who have left the red
foot-paths across the village,
Eyes of young wives, widows, eyes of children looking
into Triad Time.
And of the homeless, of the deprived, of young men and
women,
Like rushing fire raining mountains in millions of eyes.
Crowds from the Drought, the Flood, the Riots, the Division
of Bengal, the trademark crowds of free India
And the crowds of protesting students, of the retrenched,
of strikers,
Crowds in protest against pious publicity, crowds of the ill,
the hard-hit,
In the crowd of dreams all the roads all the hundred
waves surf down on all the eyes.

Some today or yesterday or some the other day
Pull down the dense blue of hills
Into the bottomless blue of dreams
In the blood and the bones of the bloodless flash the
city roads
Across oceans and mountains.

In Dante-hell our life is a flaming tongue
With the noonfire of dreams in many eyes.

Do you think they'll throttle your voice?
Will churn up the Poison through hostilities?
What tricks they resort to, what a noise
They raise, now cajolings and now threats
Such cheap melodrama hot-and-cold and crude.

They don't know whose puppets they are,
They think their king can trespass over three worlds now,
What pious talks come from the agile politicians!
What confusion in the truths and untruths of the Pilates!
Don't they know we are not impressed?

Whispering into these ears against those,
Telling those that these will cut their throats,
They are not Prahlads in their clans,
They are in search of hangmen all over the land
Oh, in vain, in vain, these astute diplomacies.

They have no more a place on this sea,
The blue is over this land, in this Blue-Throat.

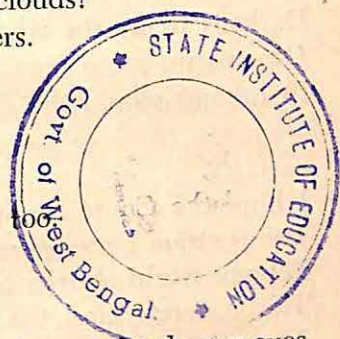
He never gets lost. He
Knows no defeat
Dust storms darken the sky
— Where is the Son gone!

Ogres and demons shout,
The Pomegranate-bough almost breaks.
Do they obey mere verbal rage!
Death has to be fought by Life.

Where is the Son? When will he
Rouse life back in the land of Sleep
With the neigh of the Winged horse, can't you hear
The echo of that cry across the winds?

Is that why the Farthing hill collapses,
The bony highland turns wet with green,
The sky reddens with a thousand clouds?
We know indeed the Son remembers.

He does not get lost we know,
He knows no defeat.
Ogres attack the land of Sleep,
Perhaps they think the Son sleeps too.



Do you bend down your face? Why do you cloud your eyes,
Your pain is my life too, on razor's edge
Day and night, the sleepless anger, the humiliation,
the futility
Burns at my forehead, why do you hide the lightning flash?

The poetry of the world, the consciousness of man's
Long civilisation burns all the time, hence this rage—
Hence in your eyes, in the daily routine, this resistance
In our honourless paleface roof-toppled crushed Everyday

And so the Past is aflame, and the future is the Banyan
In full foliage. You know that this is no game
On a tower, no mere habit or infatuation, this also
Is history, is power that creates,

Is life that wins over livelihood — a protest to live, to love,
Is no aggrieved sentiment of mere loveplay. So we snap
 fingers — we weep, we laugh
To build life in love — this life that is love's long May
To build the plinth on level earth. That is why the fire
 inspires,
With an eye on your eyes, in the other eye
 Kailas is on fire.

I want to rhyme the Conscious and the Unconscious.
The split between mind and life, body and mind
Darkens today the whole world.
Dreams no more obey Censors.
In dreams would the days of first love merge with the
Epoch of crisis.

I bind the Conscious with the Unconscious in rhyme
The division between mind and life, the one and the many.
Yet my world shrieks in pain,
The concrete and the symbol remain apart
The peace that creates yet howls in the blood.
That is why the old rules break down today,
The *déracinée* loves and lives for the Crisis.

The Conscious and the Unconscious today
Join hands in the Dream, yet the divorce of mind and life
Blooms into the blue-rose garden in the blood.
Dreams no longer follow the code,
But sow Crisis in garden and wasteland.
The rhythm of the moment dances into Triad Time
And holds stormy peace in uplifted fists.

(1944)

WATER MY ROOTS

Their beginning was in spring —
In one sense of course, late winter,
Or earlier still,
Last year—or the year before,
Year by year, in the long process of nature's work or law,
Within the restraint of a handful of enclosed earth,
Bound by the freedom of the wind, solemn with a soft wet
resolution

Their prelude of fragrance rings
On the petals with the pizzicato of pollens.

Last year in the dripping procession of the rains
Or earlier still, in the five-year-long for adventure
Out of life's assertion comes the abundance of today,
And so today
When lonely melancholy falls over the sky
And the warrant of darkness on the red Simul,
The gold of the Gul-Mohar also pales
And the starlings hush their chorus in the rose-apple garden,
And the crows of Calcutta and the flight of sea-gulls are far,
Then in the buds throb some intangible passion,
In the patient hearts aches the fugue of April
In the spasm of tremendous pain, in one certain resolution,
in creation.

Then I turn on the light
In the shelter of a book or a friend

Or listen tired to the news of rioting somewhere
Then, coming out on the open plains of the evening I see
in the unselfish sky

Blossoming pure and tranquil
Wiping away in an instant the accumulated mistakes
of time,

Like a modest lotus, restrained yet certain,
Still in the consciousness of labour
An unerring complete being
As if free among night's constellations in the sky, a sensible
existence,

A bunch of white Bel blossoms.

In the heat the original brilliance of the Gul-Mohar fades,
The Krishnachura sears the eyes

A haze of sunlight burns in the withered, fallen laburnums.
See, here and there, the people who have lost a country
panting in the shade
Beside the park, on the pavement, on the roads, beneath the
porticos.

They think, what do they think? Fleeing their home they
search for it,
Some here, some there, some in Barisal, in Dacca.

In the hot breeze the blue and purple Phurus droop,
The Krishnachura drags on and on the exchange of
garlands,
Seeking the cool shades of Jumna in the fierce heat.

See, here and there, how many homeless men are panting in
the shadows

In parks, under sheds, on the street, on mansion-verandahs,
on the pavement.

What do they think? having fled their homes in search of
a country

Perhaps they think where to go, to Howrah or is it Dacca?

We in our homes, we also a various crowd
We sing our part-songs quietly
Or we do not sing at all but shake our heads, heads burnt
by the threats and the cajolings,
Now and then some of us perhaps gasp in despair
In this death-in-life or life-in-death broken, futile
What does he think in this workless meaningless strange
motherland
Where to go, he thinks, where is a land cool with rain?

For they have seen a journey through the desert of Gobi,
many smiling men
Travellers, explorers they have seen in the Arctic lands,
garlanded with triumph,
Hearts fulfilled with goodwill born of science
Heroic with the love of man, near the burnt land of snow
Bringing the autumn of life with fields of wheat, or rice on
steppe and tundra
Bringing the victorious settlements, the prosperous societies
and the lands sing,
How many Cheliushkins passing to Howrah, Chittagong,
Bankura or Dacca.

Perhaps there is no help for it
Perhaps the suffering of separateness is history at present,
The crossing and recrossing of a dead river's sandy bed with
dry feet

Yet the summer wind blows up the Bay of Bengal
And fruit is in the mango blossom
With drifts of Bel and Mallika.
The garden is rapturous today, Time's garden.
Yet the desperate agony of living and dying
Of dread and greedy winter's
Rage and regret, leaves falling and shedding leaves,
Continue at the roots of our day, in the foliage of our nights.

If I had been a flower, or the south wind blowing
If I had remained the unwinking moon swift and
unchanging in transformation!
But we are of the earth, we are men
From following our past we fashion our future
Between this shore and that of our present
Despite some residue—in rain or artesian water.

In the pain of fruitful labour, or I might say, in keen
expectancy
Standing close together on the eddying bridge of tension
We have our inheritance
In the daily footstep of actor and the act done.
We dig, spin and weave and husk
Each and all, and if we, each or all of us, trample the grain
Some more, some less,
The good and the evil of it is for each and for all, some less,
some more.

It is our history, counting minute by minute
 Its waves spanned over life and death
 In our livelihood, in our living, in the patterning of the mind
 and the body
 In proper and improper work, in no work — despite some
 residue
 As a basin of water freezes and the ice cracks the pot.

Yet the evening, the spring evening bears the murmur of
On a charred day in death's night the sea

On a charred day, in death's city,
Still the full moon comes, real on roads and roofs
Submerging the vile shadow of the day
Sheltering the blind discord
And the trade of the crazy
Grinding to dust the rapacious demoniac voice.

Perhaps I have missed your laughter,
Full-moon? Yet I have not sought sadness
In the flood of this calm blue light from a golden moon
Rather I have counted the fortunate, the prosperous, the
shapely in land after land,
Village after village, in cities, in the rain of a far-flung peace
I have seen as if we are all floating
As if rocking on the waves of the moonlight sea
Or river or fountain of light
Under the equitable stretch, of the sky where death also is
full with age, in sons and daughters,
Mature, human, where only to live
And make live is natural.

Perhaps now the suffering is all
We have to watch and experience today
We have to go on writing in letters of our being
This mad present erring in injustice and oppression
Listening to the music of one's own and all others' deeds,
Like Bhishma on the battlefield of Kurukshetra or in that
Virat Palace

The underground hero Arjuna in the guise of Brihannala.
Or as in the preparation for March and April
In the hidden festival of the leaf-fall and in the new roots
and tendrils and new leaves

There is the inevitable pause
In the intangible but acute hymn of life,
Like the metric of verse
In the throb of the breath-tones,
Or as when with the foot raised to step down
One sees in front in the crack of the bridge
The repulse and the call of the abyss.

Or perhaps the song of the confluence
On a waveless conserving noon on the Hooghly;
Behind it, many memories and many streams of
Rupnarayan.

Damodar, Kansai, Haldi, Rasulpur,
And distant Matla, Mathabhanga
And farther still, Padma's flood.

Yet it seems stationary, solitary, with nothing to do,
Without neighbours,
Or if there are, still lonely, because, always
Somebody else's faith is perilous for you, like the flood in
the dry season
The movement of the sea ending only in the tidal terror.
Therefore, hushed in expectancy but ready for the step
In the dark theatre on the brilliant stage
At the moment before the rhythm is chanted,
Like Bala Saraswati or Rukmini Devi,
Or like an indwelling expectant mother
Deeply watchful with the grave silence before a summer
storm,
Or like a Tartar holding the reins intent, collected,
On the Pamirs, on the Aral or beside the Black or Caspian
seas.
And then the swaying begins, the swinging,
The arrowsharp flowing
Loud with the surf!
Sea after sea rising in rhythm,
Seas and rivers in the laughter and the weeping of the
great blue ocean
In the worldwide vision of that presiding beauty, rising
from the sea,
The tide surges.

In that all-in-one instant in that peak moment
The songs of the past and the future grow contemporary
In the daily, in the day-to-day routine
In the fertile silt, on all sides, mind and body,
Life in living.

Your flowing is endless, it seems, in ebb and flood
In this country and that, the unceasing surge of the waves
Breaking and building banks on shores in many a rally and
long march

In the desperate battle of the flood, sometimes in an
underground stream or in a still small lake
Sometimes in the selfcontained grace of the quiet secluded
garden

You give out the glow of movement,
Sometimes at a distance, sometimes nearby, at the sails or
at the helm

I go, a companion of your flowing, lest you forget.
I move, always,
If ever, you, in pale fatigue
Halt, with the inland and idle cascade
I revive you, spreading leafy shade over your being.

I live in you, beloved,
On the trees beside your own ghats
I bring to blossom flowers that are yours, by your own
ghats, in your garden

Water my roots.

(1948)

Nam Rekhechhi Komal Gandhar

FEAR NO MORE THE DARKNESS

Fear no more the darkness,
Cover your face with my hands,
Pass on your grief and joy to my eyes,
Construct your triumph within the walled arms,
Weave your melody on my rhythm.

Today the light hurts, it burns with hate,
None cares to have this polluted day,
Now only darkness is clean,
Love's Shahnai is now dumb in hatred.
Cover your face with my hands.

MY DREAMS TOO ARE ENDLESS

My dreams too are endless
My mind knows no fatigue,
Yet the withered wailing of the boughs,
Yet the numb cold on plains and meadows,
And unceasing the sky's tears.

Life is neck-craned in expectation—
Expectation, or is it a complex tune!
Carbon reddens in the blue of desire,
In that beggarliness, wanting is one with receiving,
The mind is visible in the body, in the fist the far.

I don't want peace without you,
I want you unceasingly.
Poinciana reddens in bloom, that too is waiting,
That is the glow of my own heart.
There is no peace for him who knows you,
Never in his life, this diamond's.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH OF BAISAKH

The music we hear, we sing with the sky and the air
With flowers in woods, on roads, in homes, evening and
morning,

The picture we see and paint under the spell of rhythm
Of the freedom of Colour, of the line with imagination
weaving ever new beats;

The stories of life that we compose, and thousands of poems
Are thousands of evening suns and thousands of sunrise.

We are no Rabindra-traders, we do not spend out the
heritage

And bind fast the flowing Jahnavi in the matted head
of any permanent settlement,

Rather we keep free our being's Gangetic flow and come
down singing,

Singing forth towards the Sea, we release the line and the
colour

In ever fresh pictures, stories, poems, in the begged source
We find out the fast current of new Ananda.

We know the racing Sun in our rebel Everyday
Spread over unbroken months and years and decades —
Every dawn, and every night, under the midday Banyan,
on the burnt-out grass,

On the sticky macadam with the impending
Baisakhi thunder-shower mad with the storm.

With each sunset and sunrise in the Chaitali wind of
summer,
In Asarh, Sravan and in Aswin, Aghrayan, in cold Magh.

We know well you shut yourself up in the
sudden rush of hot marketeers,
So we construct Life's fountain, indeed create, Poet,
And the subterranean Ganga that we in
thousands and lakhs bring down to the sea
Is indeed your own great Ananda-Bhairavi.

IN THIS VALLEY OF PEACE

Beyond the ascent of the starving hill
We reach now this valley,
At the end of the precipitous battle of the roads
Does this cool shade construct homes?

Here in trees, life is sap,
Here in hutments, songs are simple,
Here man's honour lives easy,
Have we come to our life's own valley?

We have crossed all our beggar days,
Crossed with the wind of the azure sea,
We have ended the famine nights,
The cloudy nights, we have the sun
With which we win the autumn dawn.
There is no desert fear in that light,
There is no flooding erosion in that October,
We are at ease in this valley.

The hill stands an architect, holding the sky
With hints of love, of the cloud and the sun
Of the farflung air of quickened freedom.
On this valley by the bank of streaming songs
The light of laughter falls in rays down on the land.

Oh! this our land is a poem indeed,
Beyond the steep and starving hill,
Where the beggar days are at an end
In this valley of peace, green peace.

THE SONG OF THE JUNIOR

Your early years had been scalding pain,
Our times hung heavy all the while,
What calamities, what disasters to pass through!
On the wide wilderness of huge Time
I see your hand beckoning, under your Banyan shade,
With the boon of your thousand skyey roots —
And our dead adolescence and youth come to life.

Not of the enchantress, it was of Man's own making,
Of men of the Earth, in Man's homage to Man!
With pin-pointed eyes and ever-alert work,
The heart was ever-quick, Lenin's mind and life
Gave wings to youth, high up to the skies.

And so we all hear that music of the stars
And see Volga imaged in Ganga!
Yes, we admit our nights and days are our own,
No magic gift, but sons of the same Great Mother, we bring
With folded hands, into your hand, our late-born youth.

Elder! you built up the archetype,
So, on the shoals of our Ganga
Across Meghna's current we build up history, of the
New Life
Through the floods of the Dream on our burnt-up
wilderness.

However eaten-up and arid be the Present
One blue sky sings over both the lands.

Bind our youth with your Rakhi of Friendship.

(1947)

EVEN YAMA CANNOT TOUCH HER

You must have seen her, our old grandmother?
She has suffered much, seen many wrongs done, many
deaths,

Yet her whole being is unsullied, her white-haired charm
Has another species of dignity, the beauty of having
seen much,

Yet her words of wisdom flow in impersonal empathy and
controlled anxiety.

In our old lady's aging undefeated wisdom never flickered,
In her eyes glows the bright cool sky of autumn,
Sun-golden, she is unique. Her simile? Have you
discovered your Motherland?

Yama, they say, is afraid of her. Death, they say, avoids her!
All her seven sons are gone, some in the far commissariat,
Some in search of Lakshmi crushed under the guddee,
Some acquired a vague bad name and some stocks and
shares in market-places,

— All have been taken away by Yama. Only to the
glory of one

There have been home-raids by search parties, but he is
never at home

Or he is an acclaimed prisoner, whom always his country
calls forth, —

The son whose face once seen, even Yama dares not touch
our old Grandmother.

A VILLANELLE

On this petalled day on night's red flower,
Whose breeze is it blows the blue speech of the woods?
And words gather on the gold river-banks.

Light gleams through your black hair
On dawn's dew face day's hope beams
On this petalled day on night's red flower,

Which you unfold with your repeated touch.
The heart stops trafficking in that dawn,
And words gather on the gold river-banks.

Who is out on his quest and who lost on the way,
Who cajoles Durvasa of the glowing twilight
On petalled day on night's red flower?

No more do nor'-wester clouds billow forth
The sudden sob and the swift smile,
And words gather on the gold river-banks.

That tree is this heart, by whose stem
You sit all blossoms and spread sheltering shade
On this petalled day and on night's red flower
And words gather on the gold river-banks.

Alekhya

ON 31ST JANUARY 1948

Deaths numberless, hateful deaths, unnatural deaths!
All the ghats and the silted banks are littered with corpses.
Torrents of tears rush into Ganga, Yamuna, Meghna,
Satadru

With these hundreds of vicious bloodblinded festivals
of murder,

With the sins of the fathers and the uncles
The whole land is piled up with corpses in the Doab, the
Punjab, our delta, in Sandwip and other islands, —
Our motherly riverine land, our own motherland.

The flapping wings of the vultures, the jackals' breathblasts
Eat up Aryavarta and thousand lamps of Civilisation
die out.

Yet you stand up our Himalaya,
The source of a hundred rivers
In the clear sunlight of Manas-Lake,
In this river-mothered land, you our sage grandfather,
You the great sky overhead,
Death-defeating, life-conquering,

Like the Himalayan scales measuring and spanning our
Earth—

The two long arms spread up to the two seas:

Vultures die there gasping, in that Kailasa air
Jackals die from their own bite, there on the peak of Life
Where from the Trimurti eyes shines forth Rudra's light
And Love's own grace on the Mountain's snowy mirror
The demonic King Cobra droops down limp, the wily
Nahusa crashes down,
Burning in the void with the crooked intestines in tatters,
And spiders slink down into the underworld of dirt.

Unto Life you gave your life, life to Death, with the poison-
and-the-nectar unified in the churning,
Washing all in the fountain spray of holy Mandakini.

On the riverbank in the white sunlight
We meet in grief, bring life's warm words
With the expiation of impurity, of our impurity.
It is our sin too, this curse of your death
Has made us take the oath of hatred against
This horrible murderous lust for mad power,
Has united us unconquerably to
To our children's children, our innumerable great grand-
children —
To the future.

Our grief today is the pure stream of an angry vow, a clear
stream
Of friendship
In our broken hearts
With our people.

I WAS ALONE A ROCK

I was alone on the hollow heath, a refugee rock,
Black mountain or hillock or perhaps a mere boulder,
You came and inscribed your edict and established your era.
Today, if you go, erase every mark of your signature.

What I was alone, unperturbed, a sedimentary rock
That only you may leave behind—take away your
long history:

Go, if you like to faraway Indraprastha, Mathura, Mithila.
Let my original existence in the blue void blow its breath.

Or else, at least, break all your rock-cut memories to dust,
Destroy, efface all the gorgeous sculpture,
Leave me scattered here and everywhere, the food of rain;
I shall break into fragments with the flood, and the
resident snake will float away.

Where can you escape? Yours is this memorial mountain
Which never bowed its head even before the cunning
Agastya.

PORTRAIT No. 9

Tightly she wound the anchal* round her waist,
And with a moment's pause in the flicker of her rapt eyes,
Leaped across with such light easy grace and went her way.

Across the black-rock limbs there flashed a curve —
In white sari with the common red border
Flowing to the liquid rhythm of the basalt but
soft straight body.

With such grace, such sure rhythm,
Can we not also cross
The steep chasm of the hill we face?

* The end of the Sari.

Tumi Shudhu Panchise Baisakh

THE ALIEN

On either side the woods, in the middle the road
Gleamingly goes winding as Nature beats the tune.
In the night-light, every now and then eyes glow,
Young rabbits jump across dancing.

I've seen in the Palas bushes on rounded hillocks
Wild peacocks' Katthak in sudden joy,
By the shady tent on the golden sitar of the stream
I've counterpointed its grace.

They come in silence to the riverbank and lap their drink!
I've heard the fawn-call of Sindhumuni.*

There goes the panther in greedy violent steps
Rousing the entire Kathakali tempo of wild life.

Where are those woods gone? Yet there are no settlements,
Only the bare plains, only the howl of the dry wind.
The jungles all cleared off, the villages dead, the cities
Yet to be founded and the peacocks stuffed into
commodities.

Why in this land is man dumb and helpless?
Why are rivers, trees, hills so unimportant?
How long do we roam about carrying our tents?
When does the alien set up his own house?

* Cf. The Ramayana.

HE WILL COME HE SAYS

I wonder—what do I say to him; his message says he
will come today —
Shall I say: the splendour of the Simul petals is no
longer here;
But the Gul-Mohar still holds up to the Sun
bunches of gold,
Is that why you choose your time to come at last?

When he'll smile first with his lips and then his eyes,
Shall I say: You've come today, I've no proper rooms
of my own,
Chaitra is gone, and, with Baisakh sobs, so many twinings
Have gone loose from my life's span, have you come to
see that?

Is there in your curious look something of the future sky?
Do you realise that much time has been wasted in this
climate?
Do you wash away life's long exile in one afternoon?
Do you know you bring into my arms my life's new age?
You always came to my mind, come today direct into
your own land.

Smriti Satta Bhabisyat

REMEMBERING, BEING AND THE FUTURE

You are young, do you also
Know this nostalgic sadness?
Memories of the first Mahidas* hurts,
The pain of Bhumidas memories
Is the sky over our consciousness.

You are young, does this coming and going
Bind our consciousness to this changed Epoch?
Has your young history of two and twenty
Reckoned with Time
And look forbidding in your happy freshness?

You are young, is that why you are
Not familiar with our Exile?
One's own home is quite unknown,
Is that why an emigr  from birth
You luxuriate in patriotic memories?

You have this half-knowing gushing excess
Imported from marts and markets
Half strangers' new fangled fancies—
Do you realise we are the people you really know?

* Aitareya Brahmana and Aitareya Upanishad, Son of Itara

Look the sudden rise of the fifteen-floored building
Or perhaps fourteen who knows, maybe seventeen,
A shrieking joke at the sky and the earth,
Like a giraffe raising its neck, or a tyrannosaurus,
Surrounded by hippopotami, crocodiles, cobras, hyenas
and jackals
Have arranged fine ! the office, the guddee, the clerk's
floor-spread—
Out of place, out of sense, ugly
—A knot on Calcutta's fateful forehead.

Here at this end, imitation of Gothic, there Corinthian,
Ionian, Doric,
The British fancy of Kedleston,*
Though, of course, with Time's alluvial layers on the
surface
Of the foolish Sahib's de luxe whim accrued some
polish of habit,
And the eye got used to the rustic's High Court, the
villager's Museum,
Even the gubernatorial palaces,
And on the native roads of the thievish empires
In lanes and bylanes the fantastic overcrowded gaudiness
Pleased if not our eyes, at least those of a few interesting
Darling Sons
Of Alals**, of Owls in the Shopstores of old, old chattering
birds
In the mode and style of the Pakshi-babus, in prosperity
and in the lack of it.

* Kedleston of Lord Curzon, 'that very superior person'.
* Still

✱✱ Silly new Babus.

† Drug-winged!

But after all the narrow strip of Calcutta's waterish soil did
provide some sap, some sunlight
To Shachish*, to Binay*, to Gora*, to many Swadeshi boys
and young men
Who did find out and know Calcutta, who wanted to be
healthy, self-sufficing, whole.

Now on the one hand, the delirium of the dying
And on the other, melodramatic nonsense, stupid,
ruthless, uncivilised, inhuman !
Who will say fie to whom on the seventeenth floor,
All over the land all sorts
Of mad play of irrelevant luxury !
Hurl your bright rays, raise up floods, O Sun, O Sky of
consciousness.
Sweep away this daily but accidental death
Rather than this give us the Salampur epoch's end of the
Scare-Crow's bare meadow

We can't manage even to hate him to our heart's content
He has no place near about the heart,
He is visible only when he goes about the blind alley,
He never shows himself in the hall or the meeting,
If on a sudden I see those inhuman eyes in the jungle
of the city

I admit I am taken aback with fear,
But to hate him for that is beyond my power,
Where is the shame in our defeat in the wilderness?
After all a beast is a beast, however great its fury,
Where is any place for it in the real world of our mind?
Death by its nails is unbearable with its pointlessness,
With its suddenness, but of course we do want to win.

* Famous characters in Tagore's novels.

And so we have the vision of the victory, so the triumphal
song resounds,

We want to end this sin of Suddenness.

But for all that, how can there be hate except between
equals?

The snake may wriggle by our legs

There may be by the door or in the corner scorpions or
leeches,

Though they have no place in our life's real world,

It is true if you trample on a reptile, your nerves tingle
with revulsion

You may even crush it with your shoes,

But does that mean that you will soft-cushion the scorpion
with your disgust,

Or invite the leech into the hall?

The leaves of hate fall with the wind, hatred's soil is
acute love,

We bind our life on such roots—and so ignore it—

Not a man, not even a lion, an invertebrate—

It does not deserve even the curse of our hatred.

In this hell,

It seems there is no hope, no Life's pure idiom,

Today wherever we dwell is neither village, nor city,

Nor plain nor hill, no river, only nightmares

There are no labourers here, no peasants,

Today where we are, there seems to be no hope,

No hope to live on, no idiom to save life,

There, epidemics are unending,

There, the moon of weeping which is a monotone in the
dry famine land

Does not reach the heart, there tears are dead,

Because no one has any hope,

Or has so little, that there is not even hopelessness.

The epidemic is in the consciousness.

It seems there is no hope, no life's own language.
Here we have Want, Death, Starvation, Accidental Death,
morning and evening,
Throughout the months, this noisy Worship of Death,
Here there is no forest, no ferocious beasts, no aboriginal
man.

No forest-dwelling apathetic hermits,
No civilisation, the hearts are all dried up pools and tanks,
The Intellect is a silted-up canal, eyes—ears and all the
 senses are staler than stolen goods,
Perhaps there is, for the young and the old, no hell.
Some are hounds for Hindi, some sharks for English,
All sorts of irrelevance, all sorts of hunters and the hunted,
But all very minor, unselfconscious or only half conscious,
A caricature of Hell, a parody of Death itself.

Give us the burning of Hell, the self-regret of Hell, O Yama,
O Life!

Bring tears to the palaces and mansions, to houses and hovels

In the fatigue in the marrow. Give the speech of Agony, give
Sap-moist roots to flowers, fruits, branches, leaves.

Bring life in transformation of the habitual, the bitter, the distressed.

Let the razor-edged swift clear-spoken protests of the
Consciousness

Achieve this twilight clarity of life-and-death
In the swaying loudness of the Baisakhi Sun and
Kal-Baisakhi storm-clouds.

This king's daughter works in an office,
That king's son wants a job,
They realise well that today
Throughout the kingdom they are just nothing.

Yet at the crisis of the grown-up's dawn-age
The young man broods sitting on the steps,
The girl is indeed the king's daughter,
Though he is no-wise a prince.

Out on the bench in the Park or on the pavement
These two often have their talk,
What many others have in their lucky present
In their case is quite otherwise.

And so now and then this king's son
Joins the noisy street rallies,
And so that king's daughter opens out her heart
In strikes and processions with a sense of glory.

You see they love! and so in hate
They are aflame body and soul,
On the fiery harp of their wants
Life glows with singing youth.

Tired? What is there to be afraid of in that?
Let us be tired on the day's edge,
After the day's work in the machine-room,
With drilling-machine, the carpenter's plane, or the
spindle—

The fine or tough hand's satisfaction
And the fatigue of the fulfilled day.
As one united team on the horizon-to-horizon fields
With the long serenade on the tractor
Makes the soil tired and full with the forthcoming crops—
And, Sir, we desire that fatigue!
And after that, we return home like the Sun
We, the Sun's cousins,
On the left of the track by the dam,
Passing by the right-hand hospital,

Lightly treading on various fallen flowers, fallen leaves of
various seasons,

On the edge of the day faces the hill,
Pleased with bird-song, everyone work-tired treks back to
his home—

Some to singing, some to some other entertainment,
To reading perhaps under the electric light,
Or just to gentle leisure.

Perhaps sitting or stretched on the verandah, or the
plank bed

Looking at the growth of the moon from the horizon's circle
to the heart of the sky,

How the sickle slim moon turns fifteen at the end of the
black or the lighted fortnight

In Nature's own play.

Why be afraid of work-fatigue? But, Sir, not this fatigue,
The irresponsible fatigue, irresponsive, of this village-cum-
town vagabond society

Is very tiresome indeed.

There is no such fatigue in living in a woven pattern
Of knowledge and real life, all brothers! we
Long for that work-tired leisure.

You all know Rabindranath's story!

Everything is ready, the courtyard of the garden pavilioned,
The ovens are all afire, at the gate the Shahnai
Fills the air with the universal pure music,
The stores are full of edibles, the inner apartments
Are fully prepared with bright decoration, many wedding

Ladies of the clan and the neighbourhood are all volubly
gifts,
restlessly busy,

Lots of children play about, to be sure, the bride
Is having heart-throbs in excited eagerness. Everything
is ready for the wedding.

Even some of the bridegroom's party have arrived,
the assembly hall's crowded thick,
The conch-trumpets are ready to be blown, lolule cries
Almost ready in the Eous'* pan-red mouths—
Only the bridegroom is not there— !

Rabindranath's fable! the poet drew the wonderful picture
Of the life of all of us,
Yes, heart-rending, terrible, strangely enough :
Everything is ready for the wedding,
Even the bridegroom's party have all arrived,
Only the bridegroom is not there—

Or perhaps they are not the bridegroom's party, not all of
them,
In that crowd there are thieves, cheats, respectable or lowly,
And a variety of beggars, some Babus, some Sahibs,
Beggars of man's Being at the gate of the Soul, out on the
Mind's road,

In lorry loads of society's dust-bin refuse,
Not healthy, but not slum-dwellers, but chair-holders in
Store-houses, in secretariat offices,
Unhealthy in body and mind, in life, not perhaps in money
or power—

All sorts of people of the bridegroom's party,
Only the bridegroom is not there.

The bridegroom wanders in search of his Being, his own
persona
He searches across fields and marts, towns and ports, his
own being,
Identification in the view of the 'ten', but in the reflection of
the social convex lens
He cannot view his own being, which only like a flower

* Happy wives privileged to participate in wedding rites.

Blooms forth in the Sun and the Rain, in the shade on the
clay,

In nature's orchestra of roots, branches, leaves
The being of whose essence lies deep in the clay, in the sun
and the rain

In roots and branches and flowers
Even when it is arranged in a vase.
So now we have no being in the home, no organised life,
In drawing-rooms or tea-rooms,
In spite of a thousand efforts in the intellectuality of the
vase.

This simile has many facets, simple in application, but
stage by stage

For our individual, for our society, for our country.
Think of the country, well-watered, well fruited south-
wind-cool this Mother, our Land
Maimed, marred, yet rich with the sense of ancient identity
of Being

Fortunate, fulfilled, flowering in Time's great garden
Cohered in instinctual wisdom,

Yet unrelated, scattered into bits, maimed, disabled by a
thousand thrusts,

As if the body is all there, only all the nerves, the ganglia
are paralysed.

And so in our minds, in our factual life, headless demons
abound,

In Bengali, thousands of Rakshasas in thousands of guise,
many trickeries, Power's many tricks.

So there is no self-identification, no individual and no
sense of being,

In the land of the Red and the Blue Lotus today there is
no bridegroom.

In this widow's land, the young beauty, the aurokshaniya*
has no bridegroom, no being.

* A girl who has grown up and must be married.

The Being whom human civilisation has been dreaming
forever
From the time of the primitive tribe to the age of Empires.
The pain of it brings about false greed, wrong Egotism
Falling under the feet of great might, as Deutschland rabid
for another empire
Did at the feet of the Nazi nightmare, during the period
Of Rilke's solitariness, Kafka's horror—
The same kind of men who had composed unbeatably
beautiful

Symphonies, quartets:
So many Beethovens gone deaf in agony,
Or so many Nietzsches, so many Hölderlins who had
chosen the loss of reason,
In the loud hysteria of hundreds of Wagners.

It is for this greed, history reveals, England built up
The unity of the magic tree shade of her World-flung empire:
The wizard-foliage has withered, and in the north and the west of England
People want self-rule,
And so, many think that in England there is no peace except birth, copulation and death.
They think they are a kind of Harijans, refugees or emigrés, no obligation, no responsibility.
On the other side, we see the Crisis, the problem of Being, Of the limited reality of integration, of equality, of comradeship in continents,
Here and there, in the group, in the community, in the flowering bud of Personality.

We are no emperors, even in our dreams, we do not have
the aristocratic decay of England.

Not even the mandarin-minded pleasures of la belle
France
Which has come to be limited to the luxury of one bed
to another,
To the wandering search for crow's dung of existence,
in Algerian fatigue,
Even that is utterly pointless in this inconsequential land
In our burnt-out days, our sad nights.

Yes, we are in Hell, though we do not quite realise that,
And so in the wedding-hall, in the hidden hell, the
bridegroom doth not come!
Yet this King's daughter and that King's son are ready at
Hell's gateway,
On the high road, waiting for welcome—
Only wanting to be established in nature's normalcy,
in protest,
Desiring man's life and dignity in benediction—
Indeed, they are the Bride and the Bridegroom.

IRON AND RUST

When did I sing long ago in your Kirtan
A happy Second Voice !
The hymn of love is all washed away by many rains,
Its memory remains.

Memory does not die in the Sun and the Rain,
Long lives strong iron.
Only on the nerves of pain glow
Rust's fine ion.

IN VAIN THIS MEMORY'S WATCH

In vain this Memory's watch
In vain do I hold the door, if for once I open out the
window
Day and night are a couple of fugitive darkness on Time's
hill

The loneliness of youth now knocks against the old bones
The heart's Cherapunji follows the new logic and yet is a
flourishing Sahara

Oh I am in an absolute nothing, I forget when you were in
my own land

Yet if you do come, see, that Bokul plant still grows,
I work on your own garden, in case you do come;
punctually, I pick ready the flowers
The sun sinks in the west, every day brings in the cowl dust
evening,
With one red star on the newly-wed vermilion forehead.

THE CIRCUS TIGER

Great excitement prevails, in village after village
There is real panic. The tiger of the town circus
Has escaped behind the jungles of the neighbouring Tiger hills.
His raids are frequent. So, a few of us have come,
rumour-drawn,
Uninvited to the forest bungalow. It has been said, if we
but
Venture out three steps at the stroke of 1.30 a.m.,
We may notice his fluorescent eyes burning bright with
furious rage.
For he wants the upperclass happiness of the cage,
An unprepared runaway, not used to this free forest,
Initiated in misery, like a criminal for the hangman's cord.
We too spend our nights out in the open, keeping vigil,
And suffering the company of gnats, insects, worms and
mosquitoes.
Our ears are sharpened to alertness. Rumour has it how
The circus tiger lifted goats and cattle today from one
village,
And human children from another the next day.
Some of us beat the forest; some go far, stalking him
From one forest to another, across the entire countryside.
All in vain. For the ex-circus tiger from town
Is an astute performer, partly driven by the habit of hunger,

And partly through habitual perversion of fancy, he has
become
A millionaire of greed; in his disgruntled sickeningly
Competitive fashion, he behaves as if the entire world
Were his happy hunting ground.

Tigers born and bred in the forest begin to dread him.
Nor did we see any way to cut short our stay
On the self-appointed task. Haven't we sworn and vowed
And resolved to liquidate the menace!
So, not a night passes without some of us keeping watch,
Covered and camouflaged,—perhaps in the way
Lenin and Stalin kept vigil, ever prepared,
In October nineteen hundred and seventeen,
We were as keenly ready as they—if you but compare
Great things with small! Stock-still one moment,
Or rush along silently the next, with raulfia, serpentina
Entangling our feet, with Sisum, Sorea and Teak
Holding their arms round us in a silent embrace,
In a comradely spirit of pricking curiosity.
And Nature herself impelled us silently, with an insistence
And power, far more effective than all the
resolution-moving conferences.

(Tr. by Kshitis Roy)

BHASHA

Do not falter, have hope and
Open your heart wide in love
Here, where rise the slim Sal trees by the stream
Listen to the cry of the partridge and the cooing of
the dove
Watch the ducks in their flight and the peacock's dance
If you seek here you may find the Word.

Why falter now? Have hope.
Immerse your mind in your every-day,
Here seeds are planted up the river's edge,
Harvests are gathered and orchards hum with honey bees
Here folks dance in homes and meadows
All through the festive days and nights,
It is here the Word has its base.

Why falter, poet? There is hope yet
Here, with your mind stilled in honesty,
Watch how the piston moves true to its aim
And the lathe rotates and turns out tools
And the crane in worldwide dance throws up its arms
Here let your Word keep time with the local native dance.

Do not cultivate the hope of the idle
Discard the neobourgeois lingo of the towns
Better that your humming heart rings
With the twang of the Santal's bow

With the sharp noise of the plough
Attune the dance with rhythms age-old and new,
Of the village and the town and you achieve Poetry's
language.

(Tr. by Kshitis Roy)

BIRD CALL

A single bird's call. At once
The expert counterpoint flies up the hills,
And its refrain rings out from dim light
The same music waves out from the sunrise,

Which bird is it? On the painted snow-canvas
One drop of black, like a third eye
On white Siwalik, itself still
Against the white crisis, hurts its fiery momentum all
around

With sound and light with the great song and
accompaniment
Laughs out, swaying, perhaps nods her head
Nandadevi, and blue rocks, black boulders
Sprinkle down with the deodars the joy of the dew.

I have read much into the Earth's notations,
On the coastline of wet winds in shining gestures
Jatismara* with a trail of Suns, on Sindhu and Ganga,
I inscribe the assonance of that moment.

* One who remembers previous lives.

A PORTRAIT: A CLOUD-CAPPED STAR

A known face, that is all,
The rest the imaginings of her identity,
With the glow of sympathy, that tremulous way of
Which acquires an intimacy in real-based though abstract ^{knowing}
art,
And irrespective of this person or that is filled to the brim
with sun-gold truth.

I came to know her only for a few days on the thin basis
of a student and a teacher.
After that, seeing her from a casual distance, without any
purpose
And across the bridgeless banks of years of disparity
I have seen her trudging with a bag from her shoulder,
and on her feet unsteady sandals,
She is, I was told, a working woman,
with many distressed disabled mouths to feed
in her home.

Occasionally she had smiled with a shy glance,
Or she had raised her two hands in recognition—
I had seen her for a few months, perhaps a year,
A familiar face, the perfect oval of her face luminously
youthful, but sad,
Self-sufficient yet expectant, gentle with the as-ever
feminine nature
Occasionally a very few words, in the shame of the office
work in place of her studies,

And my dry ears used to muddied Calcutta
Had caught the native rhythm of the lapping music of
Padma's living flow.

A known face, on the transparent forehead's halfmoon
a lock or two hanging,
In sweaty Sravana the bun or the loose plaits of hair stick,
But in Agrahayana the wind blows with the curly waves.
A Krishnakali of this age, occasionally I saw her but not
alone,
With her a contemporary young man, in native pyjamas.

After that I did not see her for many days,
But she stayed an image in the deep of my mind,
Because I too, we all are wayfarers night and day
Through Bengal's deserts and thinning woods.
Is that why she opened out the door to the storm and
the rain
Went out on a far tryst of her heart's desire,
Leaving behind many too-near faces, in lonely unending
devotion?

Or, perhaps she has gone to the last security of her life,
Leaving behind, step by step, this exile in one's homeland
To the difficult shore of being,
To the unplumbed sea or crowds of blue in blue
Into the infinite procession of hills?

What did I know of her joys and sorrows? what right had I?
Then why did I mourn?

Indeed, what right have I now?

She is only a sad known face of far youth—nothing else,
A smiling face of the familiar youth of the whole country
And two helpless tear-brimmed eyes eagerly turned to life.

I am not her father, nor her contemporary.

(1960)

Sei Andhakar Chai

I WANT THAT DARKNESS

Dense forest, widespread and with fearful beasts,
All sorts of reptiles, a depot of furtive killing, sharply dark
in the darkness,

Ferocious leopards, wolves, hyenas, jackals—
Fearfully dense with many treacherous beasts.

I have stayed in such forests with the blue sky invisible,
I had breathed in the rut of that damp earth.
The unhealthy air of vaporous nature
The air where in the dark swell out cobras and pythons.

Yes I have stayed in many bourgeois countries, in villages
and towns, in slums;
Many animals, many reptiles work there, buy and sell;
In broad daylight they spread out black shadows over the
hearts of men,
Hide with shadows the red-taped darkness of distant
Lal dighi.

There is another darkness? Yes, that too I know, I have been
In that deep blue darkness, in the throbbing rhythm, in the
joy and fear of bottomless remembrance,
In the primeval womb of Poetry, where throngs

The fast moving holy darkness of millions of life and death.
I have stayed in that darkness, I want that darkness in body
and mind.
In that forest even ferocity is natural, creative, sweet with
kindred kindness,
Where death is not abjectly downtrodden, accidental, is not
horrible,
In social fear or in man's vampire suction like thousands of
sharp-toothed or nailed animals.

(1958)

A PAGE OF QUESTIONS

Is ever familiar Calcutta her analogy?
As in poorly days and sickly nights
The mind wanders away to the far sky
And the wind and the plenty of the fields.
Does that mind, elbowing through the crowd,
Standing the bother of the Howrah railway crowd
Ever exult in this city,
As is natural for a lover or a friend?
Or do I think of this comparison in my weakness
As age does in greed of its own youth;
Or as when politics sinks and
Many people set their gods in the market,
Or just turn their backs
To Revolution or even to Reaction?

More, the self-questioning makes one feel small
The more certainly we know that the Manas-loka
We two live in has that purity
Which has taken away all our peace
In the incomparable ever-restless day-and-night
Dream of a greater peace. This unsullied mind
We know has let us roam free
Among a handful of men, where by our choice
Ananda is red and the blue sky is
Mobile millions of waves on thousands of peaks.
It knows that to our thwarted bird song
The world claps with a thousand happy hands.
Is that why I search for her day and night?
Calcutta has to be remade by us together.

OF TAGOREAN BEAUTY

I return home, scrape asphalt from shoes,
Wash the moist vest, take crow-fashion bath in cistern-
water.

My garret is still hot as fire and roof-tiles melt
In the heat of houses pressed together; yet I am
Relieved to see that grey in the sky.
Everywhere, in our dustbin-Calcutta's warehouses,
eyes burn.

No. No summer-tempest, cloud, wind, storm, sea, all
Dead these days, however much an optimist at heart I may
be.

In limp consciousness, therefore, I doze alone on the tiny
slice of a roof.

Wake up only when called to dinner. Do the rains
Come at last, with frantic nostalgia?
In my heart too wake up clouds, the wind, and the
assuring thunder.

Wakes up the Tagorean joyous music of Aching Beauty
And in my body too, in the blue shower on roof and roof.

(Tr. by Lokenath Bhattacharyya)

Sambad Mulata Kabya

O SUN OF OUR DAYS

O Sun of our Days! your each day was unique
In the daily darkness your numberless eyes
Used to light up each night's
Azure heart, O Sun, the poor man's friend!

Now we search after that multistarred night—
Why is Amabasya now a mere darkness?
Are you, even you, a lonely traveller in the great sea of
nothing?
Or is it that she has some other Purnima afresh in some other
universe?

(1962)

NATIONAL PRESERVATION OF ANIMALS

I remember always in the dark those fiery eyes
Of fearless life, of fawns, leopards, tigers.

I have no hunter's hobby, only in the company of the
 young big-game friend
 And the comfort of a car, the holidays pass off well, now
 and then.

This way and that. In many a National Forest
How many well-fed birds and animals preserved with great
care

Have I seen a number of times, and in the forest bungalows
Have enjoyed feasts in nature's own dawn and twilight.

Wonderful India! In spite of widespread periods of suffering

How many animals are still alive! Governmental initiative
Makes them live fairly well, in Kajiranga or Latehar,
In the forests of Hazaribagh, yes, live well—how many—
Ah! let the poor ones live, free-roaming animals are good
to look at!

Another holiday the friend took me to the preserved Girnar woods.

It was thrilling to see clearly the free native lion. I heard the thunderous roar. At that time, a fellow traveller, An officer, I remember, a gentle person, friendly in conversation,

Said, with a little smile: Under governmental initiative in
India

These national animals are not so badly off, though
red-taped lapses are many.

And he said, with a solemn face: In this national
preservation

Would it be bad to keep men too, the humans of our whole
country?

In the towns, woods, forests, in villages, in this burnt dry
land?

Suddenly, with a solemn face, the words were said, you see,
so I remember them.

(1961)

THEY ARE THE WORLD'S INCOGNITO PANDAVAS

There is no reason, none. But who lives on reason!
That is reason's great lapse.
Like that age-old Luck, reason too frowns for nothing.
Who ever burrows in books and begs for Reason's gifts!

Perhaps they have no reason, their capability is quite raw,
'Tis true they are not white Men, therefore they are almost
animals—
Yet they live! What incognito living on the street-pavement
or in bustees!
From one point of view it seems they are the world's
Pandavas in banishment.

(1962)

It is he who is the heir, Father too shouts. When many
 beggars,
 Many people sleep on Calcutta's streets, the dead are
 carried towards the Funeral Ground
 With sudden cries from the carriers and then the silences,
 he thinks
 He won't go to school next morning, Mother of course loves
 him,
 Father too perhaps loves them both. Is it true that his
 sister and he
 Keep Mother and Father bound? So with that patrimony
 He won't just answer the school Aunties and Sisters, rather
 he and his sister
 Will just go away, no, not to the Funeral Ground, no,
 But far away, to Lena's forest land, both bear-hunting.
 Or to the street corner, to the vote-meeting, both carrying
 heavy bright pictorial flags.

(1962)

NO PRISONER

No prisoner, she herself locks the door,
Inaccessible within her threshold.
I don't know what is her grief or what her vow!
She is never out in the lane, cool with our mango and berry
trees.

Yet she is my own, her free soul
She puts forth a sunflower by the window;
Life feels fulfilled when one sees her,
In her eyes night wants to come out into the noonday.

(1963)

LONGING

In the slim lissom or the full woman
The lover is ever luminous with longing,
In the colourfully striped or just red-bordered sari
The heart is ever to be fulfilled.

And all over my earth—which is everybody's land—
I place my bent eyes quick with thirst.
And in the last look, what intense dignity to find
In the all white dress of one's own widow!

(1965)

THREE SQUIRRELS

With days of great care I've reduced their terror

But my vacation is almost at an end,

And today three of them came down from the tree and
sat by the window-sill,

Why should they be so timid and so humble?

They were the direct Pioneer Corps in the sea-crossing

Bridge-constructing work in search of Sita;

Humble good people courageously ardent

With the attitude of real labourers.

Why in fear do they now climb about from branch to
branch?

They never did such jumping about—these

Official Ramadasas in Rama's Kingdom!

They still carry the imprint of those five fingers on their
soft body!

After a great deal of care I've got them down from the tree
to the window,

Now I ponder how to preserve this trust of theirs?

The time is drawing near for me to leave the hotel.

(1964)

VALÉRY'S SERPENT

In ancient times they were the image of Ardhanariswara.
Then, it appeared, Valéry! that
Your insight was correct—
The triumph of the famous Gallic genius!
Is this dialectic combat of this one-body-and-soul couple
your symbol?

Shamelessly cruel, the ego knows no limits.
It is as if the tiger or the alligator with all the teeth gripping,
With strong sharp paws, in the savagery of the ego
Go mad in the conjugality of these two humans.
But, really, which beast can ever fight
With such abandon, such hatred?

Yes, it is true the lion and the lioness
Are plunged in such duels. But that is for progeny.
Perhaps only Valéry's famous python sophisticated up in
the one-in-two problem
Can serve as a simile, if, with self-consuming disrupted
sensibility,
They mutually finish their monistic meal
On two-faced, one-bodied themselves, each on each.

(1965)

Itihase' Tragic Ullase'

THEN THE DRY HEART IS EASY FUEL

These hearts often forget their own mother-tongue,
Like infants who, with their multifarious interests,
Their various feelings under mothers' magic eyes,
Or with picking up and throwing about all sorts of toys,
Look bewildered with the sense of self and non-self lost.

Or perhaps not quite that. When adult hope
At the end of little or much wish-fulfilment
Loses faith in all words, then, in the reflected blank,
Only thinks of the risk of slipping into an avalanche,
Only hears of many Kurukshetra voices,
Just shuts the eyes and sees where goes on the dice-match—
Who knows—but only Dharma, alias Yama or Pusan!

At times, memory devastates.
I, that is we, squeeze words out from our hearts
And wet floors and pavements in and out
Because the heart's genuineness itself is buffoonery.
After that the dry heart is quite easy fuel.

(1966)

DIE KUNST DER FUGE*

Because on memory's meadows I never reaped
Gold in sheaves, never filled my soul with a rich jaundiced
homelife,
So there are no greedy rodents moving in and out in the
granary
And so uptil now the mind has been filled with

The yellow or black or red expanse; in the azure vast
I have the body's free ease, the mind's wide freedom—
As far as is allowed by impassive biological limits
And there the meagre being's dam into a free torrent is
unlocked.

Therefore whatever may be the end, suffering or not
suffering

A month or a year in go-slow Time's hospital
—I know even this is insignificant—the only truth that
matters in the world
Is that in our world only beauty is inexhaustible truth,
And to compose is to be a great good river—like *Die Kunst
der Fuge*.

(1966)

* Bach's *Die Kunst der Fuge*.

THIS IS A QUEER COUNTRY

This is a queer country, Seleucus! queer even in this era.
Yet the stormy Baisakhi showers come rimjhim with string
music,

We hear, read, all around in the sky, in the winds;
And think that on the mad weeping hail-storm will descend
damp with the untimely cold moist with the sweated
touchstone cold;

But the whole soil is loose
Sand blown by ghosts, goblins playing with flying dust,
Dry, burnt, with no shade or shadow, uprooted some
without heads, leafless.

All the canals are blind streams, rotting corpses, rotten
carcasses, and the rivers are just withered bones,
In the anaemic wind these cloudcapped hillslopes are just
bones, even the steely-seas are routed

In conflagrated burials, burning pyres
Without the measures and scales of the Earth—
As the absolving water of Peace-Peace-Peace held in the
palm-fuls of Gangetic water drops in vain
Where Life itself picks and gathers just refuse-heap
Of that land and hawks about in this land and
Gall-burnt injured or sent to death, utterly helpless
hopeless

At the end of the endless unction, and at last Life flies
To the ends of the borders of the heart's province
To some Ramdhun sanctuary.
The huge funereal Kingdom is fire-feasts unappeased,

In this Khandava fire who is the enemy and
 Who is the friend!
 You look ahead, in that little Vietnam life's tireless rain
 pours
 Pricked pressed for liberation
 At each unearthly moment, all the time, obliterating life itself,
 subduing the funereal fire, over hills, mountains, caves,
 Meadowland, roads, paddy fields, with humbler gentler
 raining than the low-lying grass
 With unconquerable tears ah! flooding death itself.
 But here where is that rain, indeed, why should it rain here!
 Here only strange unearthly ghosts and goblins buy and sell
 But no food, no shelter, no paddy, no pride—
 This land is a gorgeous but queer land
 With its queer capital, unreal but oh! beautiful
 Aleek-sundar! *

(1966)

* Not quite Alexander, aleek (or unreal) + sundar (or beauty).

ONE HUNDRED YEARS

*Follow me and let the people talk; stand thou as a firm
tower which never shakes its summit for blast of
winds . . .*

—Purgatorio: V

One hundred years have passed.

Yet so many roads, shattered roads, twisted,
Barbed, temptingly straight roads, deceitful roads!

Perhaps one hears through the labyrinth of crossroads
The laughter of unseen children,
Perhaps through the howl of hate beyond the jungle,
Across the dry plains of our days sings out
The pipe of some Cowherd-boy of some far country.

Yet the destination fades out day and night on our
perpetually frantic streets

In having to elect each step,
In every land of the distracted world,
Across desert wiles or muddy waters,
And Vietnam burns under napalms,
And, East and West, today over this country, tomorrow
over that,

Vultures fly.

What a strange bitter joke!
Yet the earth's geography widespread with milestones

And farflung history found an explorer mapping the
universe of man
A century ago! unique in genius with prodigious knowledge.
With the wisdom of the most hardworking thought, in love
with day-to-day life
In *Das Kapital*!

And in that tremendous epic the last chord rings in
Kailasan rhythms,
Like a trumpet blowing in unison with Dhurjati's dustdance,
Of what is possible in our Time and of this ever-wondering
quest,
And the triple vision reveals the Enemy and the Friend,
With the unending call of Thinking with our human joys
and sorrows,
Of the daily faring forth to the difficult yet certain
destination.

(1967)

HISTORY'S TRAGIC EXULTATION

Twilight thickens. Now darkness is one long waiting,
Sleepily and sleeplessly, hour by hour
For the not yet arrived, sharp day.

Therefore with eyes open, plunged in grey negation, we
Aspire to your weltanschauung, in patience, and listen
Unequivocally to another gladness, in our half-dead
devastated land.

We repay under our soiled sky our human dues to life itself,
Yes, in gladness, which is but the tragic exultation of
History herself,
Like the poignant music of India with its *largo* calm even
in the festive hall.

(1968)

A PICTURE FOUR DECADES OLD

Was the Sunlight's Alpona still there
On the verandah? or was it illusion under the white-haired
shadow,

His indefatigable seat on the meagre chair,
Goes on writing on the small table
In the sharp wind across the pebbly sandy stretch—
He writes, what? a novel?

The growth of another Gora? Or a new configuration of
a Damini?

Or an explanatory essay of protest against some wrong or
some muddled thinking?

Or an address or speech? or some long-lived poem?

In rhythm rhyme
In unbroken weaving, all in the mind, in chord after chord
of the flute of his Time's cowherd-boy?

He stands. A carved figure. That furious tempo of the pen
at rest,

A few steps, with the mind elsewhere, between the two
corners of the narrow verandah,

In the rapt searching-after of the two eyes from a far country
It seems from the lips of the Unconscious blossom out music,
words;

Music comes out, rises up, words and melody hand in hand
Descend with the falling wind.

Then again suddenly the victor's hand he places
On the table and in the south wind of that pen, all over,
all the time

Words fly up, melodies fly.

No the blind bird does not close in his wings.

And all the Suns come down on the verandah and sit down
on their knees,

The shadows bow down deep

In the still low-grounded air.

The motionless gazing at the picture ends

The youngman—or perhaps the boy, sitting still under the
tree, quietly gets up

And in the oncoming evening,

Holding together his intense consciousness goes back

To Tata House, to the tea-tables, or perhaps to the lonely
platform of bare Bolpur station.

GRAZIA*

Let the wonder remain,
You are the source.
Never again can I breathe
The older air.
On this death's height in this thin bright air
Where I can exhale from the pores of my being
My geographic past, what do I care
For the well-known plains of pain
And art's natural defeat?
The wonder of your face and the few words
Hold me fast on this death's height
In a strong fugue of finality
And from your mute grace
Where defeat and victory are equally rich
Springs my difficult minimal utterance,
Beyond both, and in a tone of joy
Which you know, Grazia, as your own
And also as absolute.

*Originally in English with Beethoven and Romain Rolland in mind.

IN ONE'S OWN SUNLIT LAND

In icy mountain lakes rivers spend their childhood
And gain mature beauty on Ganga's delta, in Bengal of the
Lowly people
Whose ancestral pride comes from, not Pandavas or
Kauravas, but the Sun's own clan.

The blue of the Manas-lake is in our bleeding consciousness,
Our misery knows no limits, yet the wide blue sea calls
Yet Bhagirathi flows through the hero's legs and knees and
thighs,

With tireless conch-roar, awake day and night without a
break,
A pilgrim to Kapila's Cave in search of those thousands of
lost faces—
And the Sunderbans tiger is dumb and crocodiles and
sharks dive deep.

Even in this Present we all, some knowingly, some
unconsciously
Bring down the manasa-Ganga to her own sunlit land,
At the End of the Fountain's Dream, the flat land with the
temple-spires and the mosque-domes.

We want the free sunlight one with the pool's lotus
We want that rich glory in human habitations, in life and
livelihood,

Which is possible only if death comes smiling in sweet free
will,
If the Baisakhi childhood comes rounded to the last chord
of the musical line—at eighty years.*

* Rabi (the Sun) Tagore died at eighty.

YOUR DIALOGUE, VLADIMIR ILYICH

III

Untired

In your glow I light up our days, in your hibiscus-like
ever-burning fire,

And so the Sun-red evenings have your amaranthine wisdom.

Why then again and again our days turn pale violets?

And why are our nights thorny anaemic roses?

Our each day demands the still freedom of each night,
And night longs for the end of all wasteful activity,

Wants to rhyme the twittering of dark money with the stars,

Longs for peace from accidental fatalities in our error's
traffic-jam,

Desperately longs for

Your dialogue,

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin!

(1969)

THE SIGHT OF YOU

The sight of you gives a clear view of Sainte Victoire peak,
Your words play in my mind Heilige Dankesang Quartet
Yet you are not always necessarily present!

Strange? isn't it? but that is the realised truth,
Though I admit everyday one gets confused what in
one's life
Is the tailpiece or the headpiece, and who sent the fish dish!

How humbly my days pass, with my uncertain earnings
Even that I don't quite understand, or perhaps I should
say I don't recognise the loss.
Because I see that hill the moment I shut my eyes.
Just as when I close my ears I always and everywhere
hear "Nicht diese Töne".

I know I'll hear that for many days—all my days to the end—
What the end will be I wonder! I count the days. I'm patient.

(1971)

Poetry Interrupted

IN BANGLA AND IN BANGLA

I

Yes, it is true in the context of Nature. See, how in savage
drought
Man, face sky-ward, wants, with life at stake, rain drip-drop,
drip-drop;
The nectar touch of hail and thunder helter-skelter, as if
death admits an end
And supports many generations of the Dream and on our
earthly soil comes to live fresh-bathed and immortal,
Like imminent motherhood, and the sandy shoal is filled,
transposed with waves.

And so, he whom we knew as a miraculous symbol of
extramundane nostalgic passion sang
And many of us sang in one voice: Not here, not here, but
elsewhere:
— Whose genius we see hymned by heavenly Gandharvas as
triumphant in Ananda, — the same power hurls
Again and again the sun-and-the-rain of his mighty Sadhana
on Padma, on Ganga sing in thunder: oh fie!

For the liberation of the crisis of life in Bangla, of
civilisation here there everywhere
Sings tirelessly the song of everworking fulfilment.

(1971)

III

Yes, very much a Bengali. No wonder that on this ancient
and farflung
Geography of Bangladesh, the mind's own language throbs
in the blood
— Even in my infirm body, — as if rising from the sea
of dawn.

Yet, today — be it day or night, swells big with eternity
With an indefinite but constant passion as in floods
A country boat or just a body on this river or the deltaic seas,
Untraceable the Matsyanyaya, whose and when who knows.

Yet life wants clear knowledge transmitted from eyes to
million eyes,
Wants one's own free love, healthy hate, the freedom
of anger,

Wants in Rabindric sunrise the daily appearance
We so often forget — of his Satyam, his Rudra, his Pusan
Wherever in the sky or the heart stands the live Banyan tree
Throbbing with expectation with endless positive

questionings,
The kind one can hear in Bangla, in rhythmic Bangla words.

In this land and that land, rapt with the ripple and the roar
Of the waters of Ganga, Teesta, Padma, of Meghna,
Whose music is carried over by Karnaphuli, Ichhamati,

Atrai, Jamuna, as if all are singing across the four winds
The endless song of our farflung human existence
In Autobiographies and Memoirs and his scattered leaves
and whirling letters.

(1971)

VI

Let hell be public, then Inferno
May be expiated and can cross up to Purgatorio—
Like Kunti's son walking across the ice.

A dog his journey's companion, with blistered feet
In an unbroken expedition, troubled at every step
By Dharma's ego, yet somehow goes on.

Razor-edged progress according to the arduous Law.
His mother, his wife, his brothers call at him in vain.
Wearing out his sin he has to trudge alone, a royal labourer.

Pushing aside the snows, carrying his own head
In public to Hell's Cauldron, he thinks: Resurrected
He may have—on Man's earth—his Heaven unto Death.

(1971)

XI

There was hope, there was also apprehension,
Because the Demon was in no way healthy,
Nor was there the mind to be cured.

Yes, we had seen sudden cataclysms happen in Nature
Of Sun and Rain and Thunder or of primeval beasts,
But when man gets ill with greed
Then the damage is worse than that of a natural beast.

At the last stage of endless fortitude
Of crores of human lives, from the lowest depths
Of the animal world the beast's unspeakable
Mastery in trickery and brutality
Makes the *Word* itself mute with the Human face covered
down.

Yes, there was anxious thought
Of the pools of the heroes' blood, the mothers' tears,
Only the extent of the excess was perhaps not imagined,
Men as we are, how could we know the frenzy of the beast
in us?
And so we cry forth to the whole world of men.

Across the Atlantic lies the journey to Hell.

(1971)

IN ASIA AND AFRICA

In Asia or Africa in this land and that, everywhere
Like those quite prehistoric giant beasts
Very soon you will all turn to fossils.

Perhaps till now blind with the sepsis of power
You yourself do not realise that unbalanced ugly body
Will sink down into the all-patient earth
Into our long-suffering burnt-up mother Earth
And people will be able to count up how many bones
turned to stones and when and where,
All those ungainly bodies with their devastatingly crude
ferocity, their unknowing beasthood, with horrible
streaks of awareness
Will meet with their unwept unsung unprogenitive death.

In that first phase of Life's experiments
You came to have that mis-power in the fury of imbalance,
And so you came to consider yourself the everlasting
Tyrannosaurus,
But you seek in vain today in this carnivorous dance of death
The extreme medication of your last gasp.

Now, mature science after long experiments knows for certain
That there is no evading her ultimate laws, in the active
aesthesis of proportions.
To be sure uptil now our humanness had procrastinated,
But her bondage has been ended, almost shredded off

With infinite patience, now she knows her poor human voice
Singing the glow of the Sun the only lord of the earth and
Singing the worldwide red dawn-song
Over Africa, over Asia
Over Bangla, our Bangla.

(1971)



(From front flap)

on the "Tyrannosaurus" of the 20th century, the "fury of imbalance" which is imperialism.

In between, the reader has glimpses of the relentless quest of a sensibility which has eschewed the easy resolutions of the romantic aesthetic; wrestles with the problem of alienation in the colonial context; aspires to transcend the dichotomy of the holy and the profane, of the lyric and the epic, of solitude and relatedness, till it arrives at a tragic vision of the total Man in history. The achievement is nothing less than that, though perhaps, unlike Tagore, Bishnu Dey will never have his W. B. Yeats. The West is, apparently, too preoccupied with its own "fury of imbalance" to listen to this distant voice.

But this book of translations is not meant for the international audience only. It is addressed as much to the readers in this multilingual subcontinent. In it they will find glimpses of the noble testimony of a quest for the tragic vision of the total man in history, a vision that resolved the tensions between Gandhi and Tagore to identify in that ancient creature called the "Man in India"—the Indian peasant—the potential objective correlate of the total man, who is, "like Kunti's son, walking across the ice—a dog his journey's companion".

About the Author

Bishnu Dey was born in 1909 in Calcutta where his great-grandfather had settled down from the neighbouring district. He did not believe in our system of education, but ultimately did his M.A. in English from the Calcutta University, and ironically enough, as he says, started teaching in Ripon College (now Surendranath College), in Presidency College, and then in Central Calcutta College (now Maulana Azad College), and retired as senior professor of English in 1969! In addition to his literary interests, he has always been affected by music, both Indian and western, and by art—painting, sculpture as well as architecture.



Married Pranati Ray Chaudhury in 1934, and has two daughters and a son, all married, and six grandchildren!

Received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1965, then the Soviet Land Award for the volume of 50 poems on the USSR, and the Jnanpith Award for 1971 has been announced.

As he says—His bio-data cannot be of much interest to anybody, his work-data perhaps a little more so:

Books in Bengali—16 in verse, 4 in prose.

Translations into Bengali—Some seventy poets and some prose.

Translations into English—Abanindranath Tagore's *Caramel Doll*, *To and from Konarak*.

Publications in English include—*In the Sun and the Rain—Essays on Aesthetics* (PPH), *Rabindranath Tagore* (Visva-Bharati), *Jamini Roy* (Dhoomimal), *India and Modern Art* (Visva-Bharati), *The Sculpture of Prodosh Das Gupta* (Lalit Kala Akademi).
